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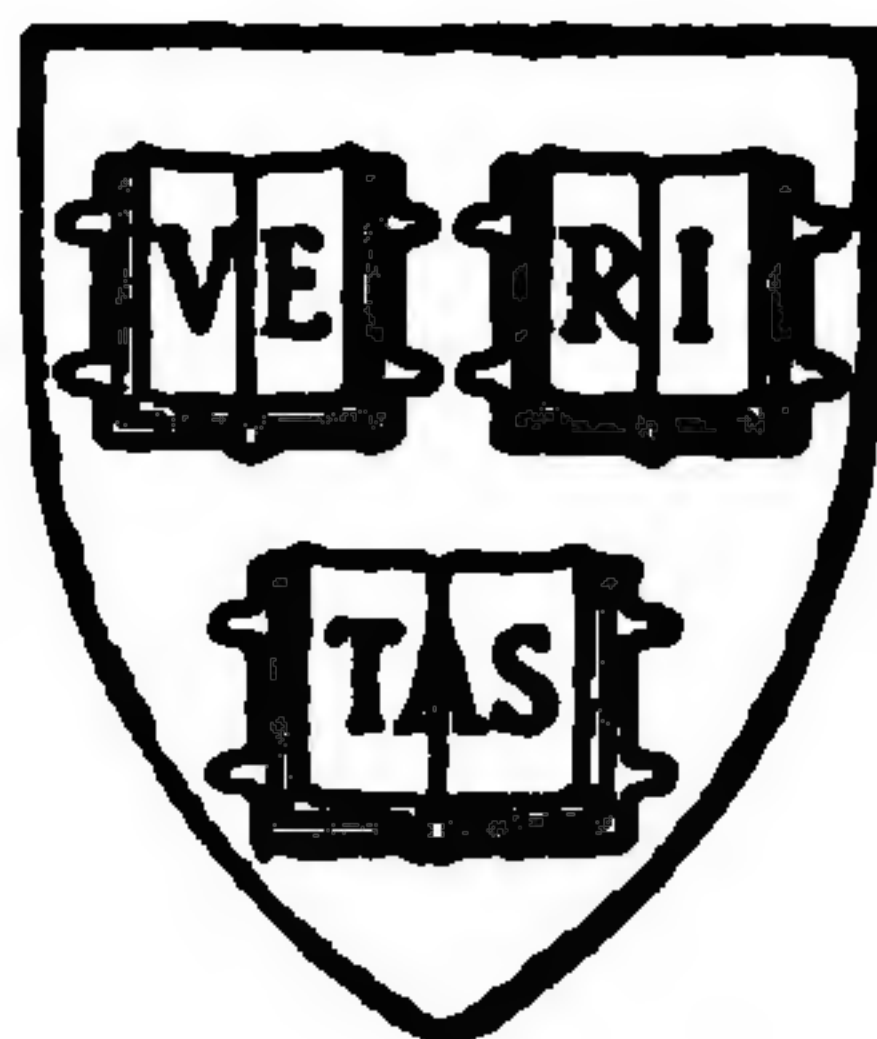
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PLATONIC AFFECTIONS
BY
JOHN SMITH



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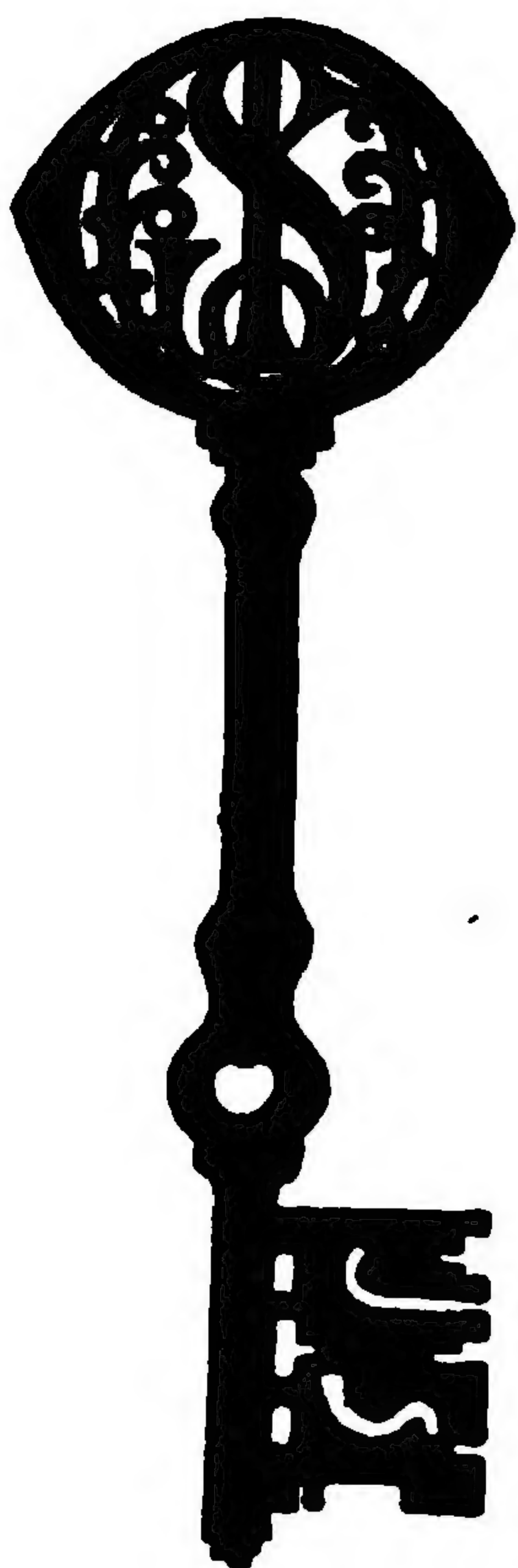


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PLATONIC AFFECTIONS





Platonic Affections

BY JOHN SMITH

BOSTON: ROBERTS BROS., 1856

LONDON: JOHN LANE, VIGO ST



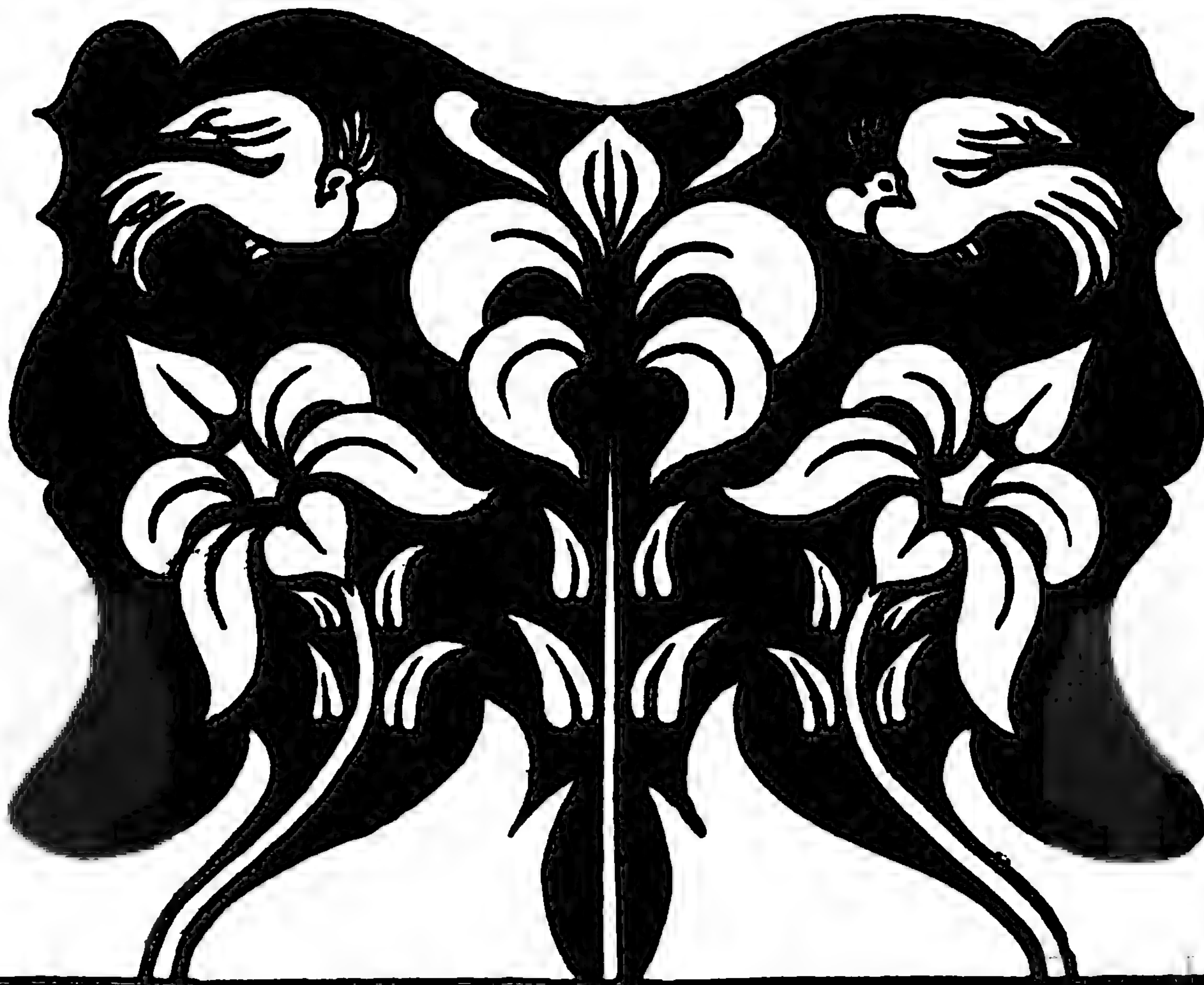


Platonic Affections

BY JOHN SMITH

BOSTON: ROBERTS BROS., 1896

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PLATONIC AFFECTIONS

CHAPTER I

LIFPORT

FOR a hard-worked city man in want of a holiday, or for a world-weary man of fashion, you would imagine that few summer resorts could be more delightful than the tiny watering-place of Lifport, in North Devon. It is so very far removed from scenes of busy life, and from what, in common parlance, we call 'haunts of pleasure.' It is so clean and smokeless.

In the height of its season, Lifport has a population of possibly no less than five hundred souls. In winter-time you would be not at all below the mark if you divided that number by five. Though by common consent termed a watering-place, it is not quite on the sea, but on the broad estuary of a river. At low tide delightful sands are uncovered, where a few children play and build sand forts, where

a few ladies ride on donkeys, where a few young men lie and smoke, where a few high-kirtled fishwives delve for bait, where, even, here and there, a few white tents are pitched—for bathing, or merely to read and lounge in.

Just above high-water mark a low wall runs parallel with the course of the river; and inside this runs the main road, the one and only road of Lifport. On the other side of this road goes a line of semi-detached houses, two in a block, each house the exact counterpart of all the others, each beautifully white-washed, and each with the same number of outside shutters painted the same cheerful green. At one end of the row is a small shop, where the visitors buy ginger-beer and sand-shoes; at the other end of the row is a similar small shop, where the visitors buy similar articles at similar prices. And this is Lifport.

One building there is, and one only, on the seaward side of the road, and that is the 'Royal Hotel,' from the gardens of which a small stone jetty runs out on to the sands, where a trawling fishing-smack lies restfully

on her side in idle enjoyment. Twice a day in the season a brightly-painted omnibus rolls up to the door of the Royal Hotel, and then rolls back to the station, usually untenanted.

And, after all, it is not the harassed man of business or votary of fashion that comes to Lifport. Such, town-weary though they be, still seek some elements of these very scenes whence they would fly away and be at rest. They prefer the band-playing, promenading, sixpenny pool-playing watering-places. And for such as these Lifport has no charms.

But, all the same, it has a very nice little society of its own. Everybody knows everybody. It seems so absurd to put on airs of reserve with people who just look in from their little garden into your little house, and see all you are having for dinner, and all sorts of other little domestic secrets. It is just like society at a small station in India, only that the climate is not so hot, so that people's livers do not get out of order, and they do not say such spiteful things of each other. Of course they gossip good-naturedly, but they say nothing, as a rule, that could merit the name of scandal. Lifport society is not large enough

for that — not large enough to form itself into cliques; without which, scandal-mongering, however desirable, becomes too dangerous.

At the Royal Hotel, Lifport, then (why 'Royal,' it would probably have puzzled even its proprietor to explain), the gaudily-painted omnibus, on a certain evening in early summer, deposited a young man, a good deal of luggage, and a large and handsome collie dog. The following morning the young man took lodgings in one of the white-washed, green-shuttered houses, and proceeded to make himself at home. He knew nobody in Lifport, he informed his landlady; nevertheless he proposed to stay there for some weeks at least. In answer to her assurance that he would not be long in forming acquaintances, he said that he was well accustomed to his own company, or that, at need, he could find companionship in his dog.

Lifport society was not a little curious about this new arrival in its midst — the more so that the majority of Lifport society young men were not advanced in young manhood beyond, at farthest, the undergraduate stage. The new young man, however, showed no

disposition to put himself in the way of any advances which Lifport society might be inclined to make to him. It was in vain that the Honorary Secretary of the Lawn Tennis Club sent him his suave and seductive circular. In vain that a very bold undergraduate asked him on the sands, very nervously, for a light for his pipe: that boon, indeed, was granted, but the acquaintance which the bold undergraduate had hoped to base on this commencement did not prosper. In vain, was it, that the large and handsome collie was patted and petted by all sorts and conditions of men, women, and children. For while that section of Lifport society which courtesy expects us to call 'fair' was, perhaps naturally, disposed to find fault with the exclusiveness of the master, all Lifport was unanimous in praise of the exceeding sociability and amiability of the dog.

Large breakfast parties are not generally in fashion in these days, but they are still in vogue among the undergraduates of our universities, and among the sea-gulls at Lifport. Every morning the sea-gulls gather themselves together in their hundreds and sit down at

the edge of the tide. Then, as the children begin to come out and play on the sands, the gulls move up, by short flights at a time, in a manner highly suggestive of the Mad Hatter's tea-party, along the estuary towards the sea. But, now, these matutinal gatherings were being rudely broken up by what, if the gulls were at all human, they must have called 'a great brute of a dog.'

Lifport had by this time discovered that the new young man's name was Heaton, that he breakfasted at half-past nine, besides other matters of interest with which we need not concern ourselves. And at half-past nine every morning, when Mr. Heaton came down to breakfast, Perro, the dog, used to jump through the open window, utter three or four joyous barks, and gallop off at best speed for the gulls' breakfast party, scattering the guests far up the seashore, far from their unfinished repast. And when that entertainment was over, Perro would come trotting up, wagging his tail, to all the children and nurse-maids, having a little chat with each of them, and then on to the ladies and undergraduates further up the beach — meeting all alike with a perfect

ease and self-possession of manner sufficiently indicative of high breeding and aristocratic surroundings. Then, suddenly, in the midst of the most friendly overtures, just, perhaps, when he was being most fascinating, he would start away at full gallop, heedless of all blandishments in the shape of caresses or mixed biscuits, for the spot whence his master's whistle had reached his ear alone.

And so, amusingly enough, it came to pass that, after the lapse of five or six days, during which female curiosity became piqued to an almost intolerable degree by Mr. Heaton's evident disinclination to satisfy it, and, on the principle of *omne ignotum pro magnifico*, interest in him reached fever heat, such rivalry set in, *faute de mieux*, for the affections of Perro, as threatened with disrapture the very foundations of Lifport society.

Such little dialogues — with just a dash of acrimony in them — as the following became frequent: —

‘That dear dog’s taken such a fancy to my children! Quite devoted to them!’

‘Oh! and so he is to mine. Goes quite long walks with them sometimes.’

‘ Ah! But I saw him leave them most cavalierly when his master whistled ’ — and so forth!

Mr. Heaton was, of course, not altogether unconscious of all this solicitude of which he was the object. Nor was he particularly edified by it. On the whole, he regarded it with a little amusement and a little contempt. He had rather people did not turn round and look at him, as he knew they did. He had rather the two ladies who lived in the next house to him were not so often at their window, trying to look as if they saw some object of interest on the distant horizon, when he went in and out. But, after all, what harm did it do him?

One person there was, though, whom he noticed in his walks on the sands, who did not seem to care to look at him as the others did. He noticed him, too, not only for this, but also because he had certain personal peculiarities of his own. His legs were very thin, and looked very weak, and his body shrunken, but his head, though lean, disproportionately large. Moreover, he very often walked with his hat in his hand, which discovered that he was rather bald, and that his head was of a curious shape, and ran

up almost to a peak at the top. He was always smoking a heavy meerschaum pipe, the bowl of which he carried in his hand. His nose was queerly shaped — Roman, rather than aquiline — and his pale, hairless face looked years younger than his bald head. He lived, Heaton knew, next door to himself. Probably the husband of one or other of the ladies, he thought.

One day, when Heaton was walking on the sands with Perro, the dog dashed off in pursuit of some thrifty sea-gulls who were lunching off the remnants of their disturbed breakfast. The man whose appearance we have been criticising watched Perro's movements thoughtfully. When Heaton came up, the queer man stopped him.

‘ May I take the liberty of asking you, sir, if your dog has ever caught a sea-gull? ’

‘ No, never, that I know of, ’ Heaton answered, with a laugh.

‘ Ah! He will, some day. Good-day, ’ said the stranger gravely, and walked on.

And the next day they again said ‘ Good-day, ’ and the day after that they had a chat, and then a walk, and then a longer walk.

By degrees Heaton found his mental attitude towards the stranger changing. He discovered that he was not a fool — which epithet, in its more charitable popular interpretation, he had at first incontinently applied to him.

Mr. Whitstable was the stranger's name. He was, as Heaton had surmised, the husband of one of the ladies next door — the elder one. The younger, Mrs. Elton, was Mrs. Whitstable's half-sister, and, young though she was, was a widow of some years' standing.

Mr. Whitstable was, indeed, no fool, for all that innocent-looking face of his. He was a member of the Pentland Club, and many knew him, painfully and expensively well, as an adversary at whist or picquet. Not that Mr. Whitstable had ever been, or been charged with being, other than fair and just, as honest gentlemen go, in all his dealings; though surely he must have asked Providence, each morning, as he shaved before the glass, 'Why was that guileless face of happy innocence given to *him*? Or why was he not able to dispose of it to some one of those hard-eyed gentlemanly rogues to whom it would have been worth a handsome fortune?'

A great deal of Mr. Whitstable's apparent lack of natural curiosity with regard to the antecedents of George Heaton may be reasonably attributed to the fact that a brief effort of memory, stimulated by a something vaguely familiar in Heaton's name and face, had sufficed to enable him to give himself a pretty accurate account of the leading episodes of Heaton's life up to within some two years of the latter's sudden apparition at Lifport. Mr. Whitstable's soliloquies found expression somewhat on this wise:—

‘Ah! George Heaton! Now this is a study—this is something interesting. Bless me, what a godsend—something interesting at Lifport—it is hardly credible! I used to see him often enough, once. My! what a thing this would be for the Society papers! Shall I send it to them?—“Re-discovery of George Heaton!” What a sensation it would make! Or have people forgotten him too much, I wonder? That world forgets so soon. It used to be pretty busy about him once, I remember—that duel of his, or rather, that challenge that did not come to anything—disappointing, that! Let me see, what was the name of the man?

Ah yes, Etheredge — that was it — Captain Etheredge, Queen's Messenger — I remember. He married a Swede — sounds funny, that; suggests "Loves of the Mangold-wurzels," or something of that sort. Poor Swede! It would have been better for her if she'd married some respectable turnip-top in her own country. And Heaton made love to her, and challenged the husband. Nice sort of thing, that! One would have thought the challenge would have come from the other side. But Etheredge declined the challenge — laughed at him — put his note in the fire, and told Heaton's messenger (who, by the way, was a parson, I remember, of all things in the world — an old tutor of Heaton's — a hunting, drinking old rascal from somewhere down in these parts) — Etheredge told him to go — where he was in the habit of telling his flock that they would go. Quite right too — duel, in these days! — ridiculous! But I believe it was not Heaton's fault either, though he was the challenger. Braggart fellow, that Etheredge — cruel bad husband, too — worse than me, I believe — and he went saying, in whatever pothouse of a club he belonged to, that Heaton was making up to

his wife, and that, by Jove, he wouldn't stand it; and that, by Jove, Heaton wouldn't have dared to do it fifty years ago, when they used to go out and settle these little matters with pistols and coffee, as a regular thing. Most injudicious way to talk in a public room! So, of course, some blarneyed well-meaning friend went and repeated it all to Heaton; and so Heaton just sent him this challenge, or offer to accommodate him if he liked to challenge—to be settled on the Continent, I suppose. Most injudicious again. Couldn't make matters much better for the poor Mrs. Swede, I should think. And then Heaton found the situation getting a little strained, and at last he did what he ought to have done long ago—he offered it—never was heard of again for goodness knows how many years; and now, bless me! here he is turning up at Lifport, of all forgotten places in the world! There's no sign of the Swede with him though. She did bolt, I remember, not so very long after Heaton disappeared. Agneta Etheredge, that was her name. Bolted with her child—girl, I think. Of course, every one said she had bolted after Heaton; but no one that I ever heard of has ever set eyes on her

or Heaton either, for the matter of that, ever since. And, lo and behold, here he is, dropped down upon us in Lifport. Dear, dear! this is promising. One could hardly have hoped so much of Lifport.'

Mr. Whitstable's checking off of the chief points of George Heaton's previous history was not so very inaccurate. Interpreted out of his somewhat spasmodic style of running comment into something rather more approximate to English, the story was as follows:—

Once a conspicuous figure in London society, Heaton had suddenly withdrawn himself from it, and gone abroad, no one knew whither. Society — setting, perhaps, an unduly high estimate on its own charms — said he had behaved very well in having renounced them just because he happened to find his friendship with a certain married lady — Mrs. Etheredge, by name — 'likely to develop dangerous energy' — to become tempestuous. It was not every one, Society reflected, that would have renounced so much because they detected storm-warnings in their hearts in presence of even a friend's wife. And, assuredly, Captain Etheredge had been no special friend of Heaton's — there were

few who had been zealous of the honor of Captain Etheredge's friendship. Much zeal had, indeed, been manifested in procuring him a Queen's Messengership, but mainly because it was sure to take him so much away from London.

Etheredge had bullied his wife, so the story went, who was a little foreign woman of a weak, impulsive nature — seeking, like a passion-flower, to attach itself to some strengthening support — until she had at last run away from him, taking with her their only child; and no one had ever heard of either child or mother since. This had happened, however, some while after Heaton's disappearance from the London world. At that time there had been some rumor of a duel — or some such absurdity — which, of course, never took place, between Heaton and Etheredge. Curiously enough, as Mr. Whitstable had duly noted, it had been reported that the former had been the actual challenger, though Etheredge was said to have virtually provoked the challenge by the reference he had made to Heaton's friendship with his wife.

Altogether it had been a disagreeable story, and Mr. Whitstable — most reprehensibly, as these ladies would have said, had they known of

it — made up his mind not to mention it before his wife or sister-in-law.

At Lifport it was, then, of all places in the world, that George Heaton took up his abode after a sojourn of two and a half years in foreign lands. Outwardly, at least, he had changed but little. Bone and sinew are not very malleable metals on Time's anvil; and though, now and again, the appearance of a new thread of white startled him as he brushed his fair hair, the fact did not obtrude itself on general notice. Heaton had no tie to bring him to Lifport, but he had seen the place of old, when he was a boy under the tutorship of Parson Passmore, a parson of the old rough sort, now fast becoming extinct, and still the closest friend that Heaton had.

For Parson Passmore's cure of souls lay in the parish of Brentleigh — but little known to fame — upon the Exmoor borders, and at no great distance from Lifport; and, thence, tutor and pupil had often made excursions, and had stayed for a few days at a time at Lifport; and Heaton now felt himself attracted by the remembrance of the quiet and cleanly look of the place.

Yes, to all appearance he was the same George Heaton as the young Society man of some two or three years back; but he felt that he was changed, nevertheless. He had become indifferent.

In the old days he had been so much the reverse; had entertained so healthy a contempt for those who were so—for the men and women who thought things ‘a bore.’ And this admiration of what he called ‘keenness’ in others he still kept, but yet had a ‘humiliating consciousness that for his own part he was no longer keen,’ as he had used to be. He knew himself to be no longer capable of enthusiasm at the prospect of cricket or sport: though, once entered on such pursuits, he could have thrown his soul into them, with set teeth, and bent brows, and keen-glancing eyes, just as of old. His keenness, too, which possessed an element of stability which enthusiasm often lacks, had extended itself, in the olden days, to quite other interests, to schemes of philanthropy and self-renunciation even—interests which had marked him off a little from the run of Society young men, and had given rise to the observation of one of them that he had not ‘developed

into quite the ordinary British ruffian, like the rest of us.' And on his clean-cut and naturally eager face the indifference which had lately come upon him had set just this stamp, that the eyes, which were as eager as the other features when the play of expression was in them, wore a tired look when you caught them in repose.

But, withal, it was a striking and thoroughly well-bred-looking young man, with that suggestion of alertness under a composed manner which is so great a charm, that had descended from the gaudy omnibus at the door of the Royal Hotel.

Heaton and Mr. Whitstable had many acquaintances in common, and soon found themselves on the best of terms; but, when they reached home, Mr. Whitstable's invitation to 'tea, or something stronger,' met with a polite 'No, thank you,' and Heaton went to his solitary lodging.

CHAPTER II

THE TEMPTATION OF THE HERMIT

‘Now, James,’ exclaimed Mr. Whitstable’s sister-in-law, as he entered the room, after his walk with Heaton, ‘you really are too bad! You knew how we’ve been dying with curiosity to know something about this Mr. Heaton, and here’s Mrs. Jones has just been telling us that you know him *intimately*; and you’ve never opened your mouth to us about him. Oh! I think men are too provoking!’

‘Yes?’ replied Mr. Whitstable, with an amused interrogative accent, fixing an eyeglass into one of his little short-sighted eyes, and critically observing his sister-in-law through it.

‘Yes, and, James,’ proceeded his wife, taking up the running, ‘you might have asked him in to tea. It was not very hospitable sending the poor young man away from your very doorstep.’

‘I did ask him, my dear, but he declined.’

‘ Oh ! ’ said both ladies together, with an intonation which Mr. Whitstable rightly understood to imply that that did not make matters at all more satisfactory.

There was a momentary check, from which Mrs. Elton was the first to rally.

‘ But do you know him intimately ? Go on ; tell us, do. What do you know about him ? ’ she cried impatiently.

‘ Intimately, my dear Nelly ! Why, I never spoke to the man in my life, to my knowledge, till he came here. I asked him something about his dog the other day, and that led to a chat, and we found we had some acquaintances in common ; that ’s all. ’

‘ What sort of people does he know, James ? ’ Mrs. Whitstable asked.

‘ Oh, all sorts — from the Queen down to Countesses. ’

In this there was a certain measure of truth. Heaton now stood almost entirely alone in the world, for he and an only sister, who had died in the prime of her youth, were the sole representatives of a family, allied, by morganatic marriage, with persons of whom it is more usual to speak as ‘ personages. ’ Heaton’s

position had thus been somewhat anomalous, and, his parents being dead, he was practically without family ties or connections.

Perhaps, of all methods of deceiving, the best is to tell the truth as if it were not meant. Moreover, of all possible means of checking his wife's catechisings, Mr. Whitstable had found banter the most effectual and attended with least friction.

So, informing 'James' that he was 'too exasperating,' his wife turned the conversation to other and smoother topics.

The next day the walk was repeated. Mr. Whitstable, instead of the usual meerschaum, was smoking a new clay.

'You see,' he said, noticing that Heaton observed the alteration; 'you see, I last night made up my mind that I would give up smoking; so I burned my ships — I mean, my pipes — so that I could not retract; but this morning I went to the shop and bought a lot of new ones — clays — four for a penny,' holding forth, with some pride, the purchase as he spoke. 'I ought to have burnt the shop too,' he went on; 'but I have bought the nastiest tobacco I could procure, so I think I shall smoke less.'

It was chiefly the naive, amusing confessions of his own small follies and weaknesses, added to the delicacy which withheld him from any reference to Heaton's past, which, the latter felt, must be known to him, that attracted Heaton to the strange little man. It seemed as if his external peculiarities were the outward and visible signs of a mind even more crooked and peculiar.

After a walk which appeared to have given each of them every satisfaction, and to Heaton, at least, had afforded considerable entertainment, Mr. Whitstable pulled up short, as soon as they came within sight of the houses, saying —

‘Now, Mr. Heaton, I think we had better part here.’

‘Here! why? Are you not going home?’

‘Well—ah—yes, I am. Well, I will tell you, Mr. Heaton. The female mind, as you doubtless know, is wonderfully receptive. Its receptivity is never satiated. It is, in fact, given wholly over to curiosity. Now, in this little place, every one has hitherto known everything about everybody; and Lifport has consequently deemed itself defrauded of its just rights because it does not know everything—in fact,

because it knows nothing — about you. Therefore, yesterday, when I came in from our walk, I was immediately beset with such a heap of questions that, to tell you the truth, I do not care again to face it. If you want to do me a kindness, and to make me go up top in my wife's estimation, you'll come in with me to tea; but if not,' said the little man, striking a dramatic attitude — '*if not, j'y suis, j'y reste*, until you are safely housed in your domicile.'

'Oh, I'll come to tea, then, if I may,' Heaton answered laughingly.

'Yes, do, there's a good fellow,' Mr. Whitstable responded with fervent gratitude.

'I must just go and take Perro home first.'

'Oh, no! on no account. You must bring him too. They'll be delighted to see him; and there's no other dog.'

After Heaton's introduction to the two ladies, conversation turned on Perro. Mrs. Whitstable asked if he had won any prizes.

'Oh, no; I would not send him to a show. And, besides, I have been out of the way of dog-shows lately. I got Perro in Mexico.'

'In Mexico!'

'Yes; Perro is a born Mexican, though he

comes of a good old English, or, rather, Scotch stock.'

'And were you long in Mexico, Mr. Heaton?'

'Two years or so. I have only just come back. Have you not got a dog, Mrs. Elton? I am sure you are fond of them,' he went on, turning to where she was petting Perro on the sofa.

'No; I had one, but my brother-in-law and he did not get on well together.'

'I don't know about not getting on well; I know at Harrogate your dear dog ate most of a postman — by degrees; and we always had to go and get our own letters, because he struck, and would n't come near the house.'

'Yes; horrid man! I am sure there was something not nice about that man. My dog did bite him in the leg one day, I must confess, Mr. Heaton.'

'Not nice! The dog seemed to think him particularly nice,' Mr. Whitstable said. 'He bit a piece out of one leg of him one day, and a sample out of his other leg the next, and carved a regular joint off him the third. He used to regard all strangers from a gastronomic point of view, that dog. He didn't care so

much for laymen, but he liked curates very much, and telegraph boys, but, above all, postmen. Naturally, what was left of the one at Harrogate declined to bring us our letters any more; so I had a mile walk every morning for them. He thought it no use throwing good meat after bad.'

'James! How disgusting you are!' Mrs. Whitstable expostulated.

'Well, one does get attached to a dog, if he is a faithful creature, though one does know his faults; don't you think so, Mr. Heaton?' said Mrs. Elton.

'Certainly one does. But the fault of all animals as friends is that they are so short-lived, compared with man. And the death of a favorite dog is a real grief. Dogs *never* say the wrong thing; and I'm sure they sympathize both in one's joys and sorrows.'

'Oh, of course they do. For the dog, though, I suppose it's happier to die before its master.'

'Well, I expect, you know, that such devotion as that implies is the exception rather than the rule. Life is sweet, after all that's said of its hardships — especially it must be so for

dogs, who are content with things as they find them.'

'Oh, yes, life is sweet, of course,' said Mrs. Elton — 'at least I suppose so. I suppose the real hardship of it is that it is so short.'

'Yes, that's it. That's the real hardship. Just as we are beginning to feel we have got hold of some experience that will make us able to live the right way, why, it's time to die. By the time we've found out the best tailor to go to, and a code of morals that will serve our purpose — why, it's all of no use after all, for we have to leave it, and to go where all this hard-won experience will be of no use to us.'

'That's it, Mr. Heaton,' cried Mrs. Whistable, eagerly. 'That's the real hardship. Why is it there is only *one* life for us? Why can't we be born again with all our experience cut and dried for us? I know what I should like — I should like to have been born a widow. There, James, I should!'

'I don't mind, my dear, as long as you don't die a widow.'

'James, how horrid!'

'Well, I always think,' said Heaton, 'that the right age to be born would be fifty. All

your troubles and hopes, and everything, would be over, and you could just look back on it all quietly and watch others struggling about in the difficulties you have got through. Did it ever strike you what a splendid, earnest, theatrical spectacle the gods have got to look down on?'

'Good gracious me, Mr. Heaton!' said Mrs. Whitstable, disregarding his theological speculation. 'You'll think very differently, I hope for your sake, when you get at all near fifty.'

'What!' cried Mrs. Elton; 'you'd like to do away with the best years of your life then?'

'Well, you see, I'm not quite prepared to grant you that they are the best years of one's life.'

'Then do you picture yourself as married at fifty?'

'Oh, no! I do not ever intend to marry.'

'Now, Mr. Heaton,' said Mrs. Whitstable, 'whatever you do, you should never say that. Whenever a man says that to me, I always feel sure I shall hear he's married and done for directly.'

'Well, at all events, I could not marry unless

I was very much in love; I am sure of that. And I do not feel the premonitory symptoms of that malady as yet.'

'Oh, your time will come, never fear; if it has not already,' she said, eying him doubtfully.

Heaton did not wince.

'Well, perhaps it will,' he admitted. 'And when it does, I'll give you leave to laugh at me for what I've just said. But though I do not believe very strongly, I am afraid, in "the thing called Love," I make up for it by a very strong belief in the power of friendship.'

'Well, then, do you believe it possible for a man and woman to be great friends without anything more?'

'Possible! Yes, I think it is, though I think that the cases in which it is possible are rare. But I certainly think that it sometimes is, and that it is very absurd to lay down a hard-and-fast rule, and say that it is universally impossible.'

'You believe in Platonic affection then?'

'Yes, I do indeed — in the possibility of it. Do not you, Mrs. Whitstable?'

'Well, I'm not sure that I do. It all goes on very nicely for a time; and then, there is

just one word of love, and it is all over—all; it never can come back again.’

‘What are those words?’ said Mrs. Elton:—

“A word too much, or a look too long,
And life is never the same again.”

I do not know if that is right, but you know the words I mean.’

‘Yes, I know,’ answered Mrs. Whitstable. ‘But I’m not sure that they’ll quite bear the meaning you want them to, dear. They’re so true, though:—

“The little more—and how much it is!
The little less—and what miles away!”

‘Ah, no, no!’ Heaton exclaimed. ‘That’s where I don’t agree. I don’t think it is “such miles away;” not what I call real friendship. Now, I have a friend—a man friend—who is just like a second self to me. Of course, to say there is no secret of my life or thoughts I would not tell to him is saying nothing; but I would tell it without ever thinking of telling him not to repeat it, or anything of that sort, because I know he will have just the same feelings with regard to it as I would have myself. Again, it is nothing that if I was in want of money he

would lend it to me without a second thought; but I would take it without the slightest feeling of obligation. Nothing that he could possibly do, no claim he could establish on my gratitude, *could* increase the affection I have for him. That is not such miles away from what you call "love," is it?'

'Well it may be as intense a feeling, almost, perhaps, Mr. Heaton,' admitted Mrs. Whitstable. 'But it is certainly a very different one.'

'Ah, yes, perhaps so. But I am sure it is a more comfortable, restful feeling.'

'Not so much of the glorious uncertainty of love about it, is there?' laughed Mrs. Elton.

'Oh, of course, it is all nonsense together, really,' said Mrs. Whitstable, rousing herself out of her thoughtful mood. 'Love is very well, and very nice to talk about, but it has not much to do with actual life.'

'Now, don't be cynical again, Emily,' her sister cried. 'You really were being quite nice, and saying what you thought, for once in your life.'

'Yes, Emily's said something right, upon which I congratulate her: all the talk about love is pretty well nonsense together,' said the

husband, who had been rather bored by the conversation. 'Excuse me, Heaton, the ladies, I know, were the first offenders. So it has ever been from the beginning: "The woman tempted me, and I did eat."' '

'James! there are you, too!' exclaimed his sister-in-law. 'You're always saying what you know you don't mean a word of, too. He was an excellent prototype of his sex, though, our first father, laying all the blame on the poor woman — the only one in the world.'

When Heaton had taken his leave, he went to his own little drawing-room, and sat down, Perro looking up into his face.

'Well, Perro, what do you think of it all? Are you jealous, old man? It's a long time since I've let my tongue run on like that to any one except you.'

But Perro only thrust a cold, wet nose into his master's hand as it lay upon his knee, as if to show he was not too deeply offended.

And Heaton was fain to confess to himself that he had done but scant justice to his fair next-door neighbors in telling Perro that they were 'rather pretty.' That description, indeed, might perhaps suffice for Mrs. Whitstable,

though her face was as sensible as well as a pretty one; but of her half-sister it certainly was not enough to say. From the point of view of a sculptor, Mrs. Elton's features were almost perfect, and upon them every movement of an ever-active mind was expressed in constant variety and animation; but at those rare moments when the ivory-white face was in repose, it wore a sad, intense look, as if in this seeming frivolous nature there might be possibilities of passion and enthusiasm.

'Now that was really good of you, James,' Mrs. Elton was saying next door, while Heaton was talking her over to his dog, 'to bring that young man in to tea. He's a very nice young man, too,' she continued, with patronizing approbation. 'He's such a thorough gentleman.'

'Yes, he is that,' assented her brother-in-law, with the conviction which his knowledge of Heaton's antecedents gave him. 'It struck me as rather egotistical, though, the way he talked about his own feelings so much. But I suppose it is to be forgiven in a man who has been so long in the wilds.'

'Now, my dear James, is not human nature

the most interesting thing to talk about? and is there a better way of getting at some knowledge of it than by exchanging notes of one's own feelings?'

'Ah! I think if you're going to discuss human nature, I'll go and smoke.'

After this auspicious commencement Heaton paid frequent visits next door; though for a long while he would not come spontaneously, but only on invitation.

'Mr. Heaton is wonderful, I think,' Mrs. Elton used to comment, as she saw him entering his house. 'However he can go in like that and *never* look in at this window, I cannot think. I could no more do it than I could fly.'

After a time, however, he did begin to look in at the open window and chat; and then would come in to tea on a general invitation, and by degrees came to be almost as much in Mrs. Whitstable's little drawing-room as his own. It was much pleasanter in there, with the bright little bits of color stuck about, and the lodging-house furniture disposed in such a manner as looked quite home-like, and distressed the mind of the landlady not a little, and the piano which Mrs. Whitstable had had

sent down from Exeter, and the flowers and bowls of *pot pourri*, — all this was far pleasanter than his own most uncompromisingly lodging-house-like abode. And, above all these æsthetic attractions, there was the companionship of minds which had many chords in sympathy with his own. No wonder Heaton was being drawn from his recluseness.

There, too, he met other, we may say all the other, members of Lifport society, to all of whom he found it easy to make himself agreeable. Even the undergraduate element forgot the envious feelings which the most unreasonable interest manifested in the new arrival had at first aroused in their ardent breasts, when they learned that he was indeed none other than ‘George Heaton the cricketer.’ And, surely, to be thus styled is no small meed of fame in an age when the initials ‘W. G.’ call to the mind of every Englishman the name, not of a great statesman, but of a great batsman.

Beneath the Whitstable influence, too, Heaton had yielded to the once unheeded seductions of the Honorary Secretary of the Lawn Tennis Club; and Heaton insisting, and by sheer force of character gaining his point,

that Mr. Whitstable should play too — a thing the like of which had never been seen before — Mr. and Mrs. Whitstable, Mrs. Elton, and he used to fare forth almost daily to the tennis ground; where Heaton, who was a very good player, and Whitstable, who was far worse than useless, had great encounters with Mrs. Elton, who, by the feminine standard, played very well, and Mrs. Whitstable, who played indifferently.

But most of all Heaton appreciated this new companionship when he found Mrs. Elton alone in Mrs. Whitstable's little drawing-room. Then he would lie back in his chair, dreaming of all sorts of impossibilities, while Mrs. Elton sang to him song after song in a voice of magnificent power and wonderful expression. She loved singing as the birds seem to love it, as all who have the musical genius must love music; for with her it was an almost spontaneous and involuntary utterance of the intensest feelings of her nature. But none the less was the pleasure of it enhanced by the presence of an auditor who could interpret the meaning of each inflection of her voice; nor could any woman be insensible to the com-

pliment paid her by Heaton's genuine pleasure — a pleasure which he did not express in many flattering phrases, but of which, he felt, she was fully conscious nevertheless.

One day he did say to her, apologizing, as foolish mankind is always bound to do for a show of true feeling —

‘Do you know, Mrs. Elton — you won't laugh at me, I know — your singing always makes me feel somehow as if I wanted to be a better man. It lifts one out of the world and makes one think that the things for which one commits little, petty sins, of selfishness mostly, are so utterly worthless. I think, you know, that that is the greatest compliment that can be paid to music; and I should fancy that it is the power of inspiring that kind of feeling most deeply, and in the least appreciative souls, that makes the great musician.’

On the following day Mrs. Whitstable had organized a picnic, which all Lifport joyfully attended, and which was pronounced an unqualified success. Given a fine day and Mrs. Elton's presence, a picnic could hardly be otherwise. Her inexhaustible high spirits, her equally inexhaustible repertoire of Christy

Minstrel melodies, and her accompaniments on the banjo, were irresistible; and all Lifport returned home, equally delighted with the picnic and with Mrs. Elton. All — except, perhaps, Heaton. For he sat for a while, letting his dinner cool for him, and went over the events of the day.

‘She’s a strange mixture,’ he said at length. ‘I wonder which is real, the grave or the gay; eh, Perro?’

Perro only wagged his tail in an absent-minded way, as if to say, ‘Oh, it’s all right: never mind that. Let’s see what’s under the cover,’ a conclusion which his master thought wise to adopt.

Next morning Heaton was coming out of his little home just as Mrs. Elton was leaving hers. It was Sunday, and the good people had lately filed up towards the village on their way to church. He asked where she was going, and if he might be her escort.

‘Oh, I don’t think you’d care to come, Mr. Heaton. I’m only going to see an old man who’s ill in the village. I’m taking him his pudding, poor old soul!’ And as she spoke,

she showed Heaton what he thought a very nasty-looking mess of stewed figs and rice in a large gallipot.

‘And do you take it to him?’ he asked, much astonished. ‘How often do you go?’

‘Why, I didn’t go yesterday. You see, there was the picnic,’ she said, as if rather ashamed of confessing such remissness. ‘But I go most days.’

‘And may I come too?’ he asked.

‘Oh, yes, do, if you like. He loves to see anybody, and he’s so good and patient. Fancy, he’s been in bed, not able to turn himself round even, with the most dreadful cancer in his arm, for nearly six months now. It’s only a matter of time. Of course, it’s bound to kill him; but he’s always so cheerful, and so pleased to see one. Oh, it does make one feel how ungrateful one is to make such a fuss about one’s own tiny little bits of troubles.’

Heaton was silent. He was wondering if this could really be the same woman that he had heard yesterday jingling away on a banjo and rattling out nigger songs with a noisy, nonsensical chorus.

‘I really would advise you not to come in;

it 's rather dreadful,' Mrs. Elton said, when they reached the old man's door.

'Nonsense! I'll come in, if I may,' Heaton answered, rather nettled by what he deemed a wholly unnecessary consideration for his masculine nerves.

The door was opened by the old man's wife. Her worn face brightened wonderfully as she saw who the visitor was.

'Come in, if you please, sir. Oh, Miss, it is good of 'ee for come and see 'un. Here's Miss Elton, John.'

The poor old man was loud, though rather unintelligible, in his blessings on the 'dear young lady.' He told her eagerly, and not without pride, of the progress of his dreadful disease.

'Pull back the clothes, mother, and let the young lady see 'un,' he said presently.

The fearful and monstrous limb was not yet perfectly disclosed when Mrs. Elton heard the cottage door open and shut; and, looking round, saw that Heaton had disappeared.

'There's nothing never been seed like it in Lifport,' said the old man, as Mrs. Elton examined the arm with pitiful kindness. 'Cover

'un up, mother; us must n't keep the young lady too long. But you'll come again to-morrow, won't 'ee, Miss?' he pleaded.

And Mrs. Elton, after a few more words of comfort to him and his poor wife, went away.

(In Devonshire the titles 'Miss' and 'Mrs.' are applied with more regard to the age of the person addressed than to their matrimonial status.)

She found Heaton awaiting her outside.

'Mrs. Elton,' he said, 'I am very sorry for deserting you like that; but I couldn't stand it. You shouldn't let them show you such horrid things.'

'Oh, poor old man! He is so proud of his arm. It's almost the only pleasure he has in life, showing it to people. It's rather a mania of mine going to see people that are ill. I don't mind seeing these sort of things a bit now. I ought n't to have let you come, though,' she said self-reproachfully. 'It's not the sort of thing for men.'

Heaton did not answer. He was a good deal ashamed of his display of weakness. At length he said —

'Will you do me a great favor? Will you

let me give you some money for that man, or for any poor people you know of in want of money?'

'Certainly not, Mr. Heaton. It is very good of you — very. But really there are no quite poor people in Lifport; and even if there were, I couldn't take your money for them.'

'Yes, yes; I see,' answered Heaton bitterly. 'I am to be utterly useless; I cannot do any good. I am such a lamentably weak-nerved creature that I cannot bear the sights that you, a delicate woman, think nothing of; and you will not help me to do any good in the only way that seems possible for such as me. Yes; my life is indeed vanity of vanities.'

'Oh, Mr. Heaton, you know I did not mean that!' she said, in reproach partly of herself, partly of him. 'There are no poor people here — not destitute, I mean. But I tell you what I will do, if you will let me — it does not seem right, either, but never mind — if you will let me, I will make you my banker when I do come across a case of real distress. May I? Shall we make that a promise?'

'It will be doing me a very real kindness if you would,' he replied earnestly. 'If you will

keep that promise it will help me to feel that my life is not so absolutely useless. You see, it is pure selfishness at bottom, after all, that makes me ask it.'

'Oh, no! it is very, very kind and generous of you indeed,' said Mrs. Elton impulsively. 'But that is a very real danger too,' she added thoughtfully — 'that tendency one has to pat one's self on the back after doing a good action. Well, here we are at home. What a serious conversation we have been having! Now for the Society grin again.'

'Oh, don't go in just yet. Won't you take a turn this way?'

'Yes, I will; I should like to. I'll just take this gallipot indoors though.'

'Oh, I say! Have you been carrying that all the way? I do beg your pardon; I did not notice. I was thinking of other things.'

'Oh, it's all right,' Mrs. Elton laughed, as she ran into the house.

If there was one thing that offended Heaton more than another, it was a lack of courtesy towards women, and he felt quite unnecessarily self-reproachful just now. The only relative Heaton had ever known was the sister who

had died rather more than a year before his voluntary exile. And this sister he had loved with the tender, protecting care of a father for an only daughter, and had trusted with the secret meditations of his heart, as a son might trust a loving mother. Even in the heat of his passionate love for Agnes Etheredge he had ever felt a consciousness that his sister was his ideal of perfect womanhood. And often he had felt his blood boil at the indifference, and almost rudeness, with which he saw brothers behave to sisters. He would have had a chivalrous courtesy in all, even the most intimate, relations between man and woman. And the unfailing, thoughtful kindness which sprang from this feeling had, without wish or knowledge on his part, won him the heart of many a woman. To Mrs. Whitstable and Mrs. Elton it had revealed itself mainly in little acts of respect, gracefully rendered, rather after the old-fashioned school of politeness, and also in trifling gifts of a new song or of flowers sent for from London, of which he would beg their acceptance as if the obligation were all on his side.

Measured by days or weeks, Heaton's friend-

ship with these ladies was of the shortest — some six weeks old merely; but measured by the hours spent in their company, it was of long standing, and was intimate to a degree rarely possible under the conditions of modern English society. But the conditions of Lifport society, though quite modern, were just a little un-English.

‘I want to see your friend, Parson Passmore,’ said Mrs. Elton, as she came out of the house and rejoined him. ‘Why don’t you make him come and see you?’

‘Yes, I should like you to know him,’ Heaton assented eagerly. ‘I wonder if you would like him, though,’ he meditated aloud. ‘He’s anything but a ladies’ man, old Jack.’

‘And, don’t you know, Mr. Heaton, that “ladies’ men” are just the sort of men ladies generally don’t care anything about, except as playthings?’

‘Ah, yes, perhaps; but then few men and women are to each other more than playthings.’

‘Well, never mind the playthings. Tell me about Parson Passmore.’

‘Tell you? I don’t know that there is much

to tell you about, except that he's a rough, honest fellow, and my dearest friend in the world: such a friend, that no man could have a better. I have other friends — a few — you are my very good friend, if I may venture to say so, Mrs. Elton; but no one could ever be to me what Jack Passmore is.'

'Oh, I don't like that now,' she cried, laughingly, accepting the challenge. 'I don't like being put in the second place. I should like to be first or nowhere.'

'Well, you see, I have only known you a few weeks yet. Perhaps you might run a dead heat with Jack Passmore some day. I don't think it would be possible for any one to be before him.'

'Oh, Mr. Heaton, I was only talking nonsense of course. How could I be anything, really? We've hardly known each other any time.'

'Ah, but I was n't talking nonsense — or did not intend to, at least — I want you very much to be something. I want you to be a very dear friend. I did once love a woman, in spite of all I have said to you and your sister on that subject. I loved a woman I had no right to love; and it was only by going abroad, and

putting a great distance between us, that I could trust myself to do what was right. She is dead now,' he said gently. 'And my heart, and all the capacity for love I ever had in me, is dead with her. I can never love a woman again, in the sense in which I loved then; but that very fact — the fact that there is nothing but dead ashes where a hot heart once was — makes it possible for me to take a woman as my friend. I think fate has been a little hard on me — I do not often repine, or even talk about myself much, I hope; but I always do to you. I had a favorite sister once, you know. We were not like most brothers and sisters; we were just all in all to each other. And, do you know, Mrs. Elton, you have often, since I first knew you, reminded me so strongly of her. I hope you don't mind my saying it?' he concluded, anxiously.

'Mind it! Could I possibly mind it? You have paid me a very great compliment. If you will let me, I will try indeed to be a sister to you. You see, I have never had any brothers, so you must make allowances if I sometimes make a mistake.'

They both laughed, rather as a relief from

their serious feelings than because there was any humor in the atmosphere.

‘ Oh, yes! I ’ll make allowances, Mrs. Elton,’ Heaton said. ‘ And, by the way, I don’t think sisters and brothers generally call each other by their surnames, do they? ’

‘ No, I suppose not; but I don’t think I could ever get to call you by your Christian name, could I? “George,” is n’t it? ’

‘ Oh, yes, but you will, won’t you? It ’ll come quite easy by and by. It would be quite ridiculous for an adopted brother and sister to call each other “Mr.” and “Mrs.” ’

They went on talking in a half-jesting, half-serious mood about the newly suggested relationship.

‘ You know, I shall expect a great deal from the relationship,’ Heaton said. ‘ My real sister and I were so much to each other! We always lived with each other, and for each other, you might almost say, poor soul! ’

‘ Ah! I am sorry for you,’ Mrs. Elton exclaimed, with quick, impulsive pity. ‘ I wish I *could* take her place for you a little more. ’

‘ Oh, yes, I do wish you could indeed,’ he agreed fervently.

‘Unluckily, though, or perhaps luckily, I don’t know which, it is quite impossible, so it is no use talking of it,’ said Mrs. Elton, with a feeling that they were on dangerous ground.

‘There’s no harm talking about it, however impossible it is; is there?’ Heaton persisted.

He had taken up this new friendship with all his old hopeful enthusiasm, and expected great things of it, though he contemplated with horror the blank page of the future, when the Whitstables and Mrs. Elton should leave Lifport.

The Whitstables had indeed, with exceeding friendliness, suggested that he should indefinitely join their roving camp on the Continent; but he had declined. The recollection of these places Mr. Whitstable loved, where the croupier droned his monotonous recitative to the click of the circling ball on the whirling wheel, came back to him like a nightmare. He could not go there. He would have to live his life out desolate and alone.

‘If you were my real sister, Mrs. Elton,’ he said, ‘I know what I would ask you to do—and what you would do, for we always liked to do the same things, my poor sister, who is dead,

and I — we would go away somewhere and find out a cottage far from all the haunts of men, and take it, and you should make it pretty, as you would know how to do so well.'

'Well, it does sound rather nice, certainly; but so are all the accounts one hears of fairyland. I don't think it's any good talking about anything so impossible.'

'Oh, I quite admit the impossibility,' Heaton said. 'That's one of the charming features of it. We'll call it a *château d'Espagne*, a cottage in Spain, in Fairyland; and then there's no harm talking about it, is there?'

'Oh, no harm! Of course not. I daresay it would be a dear little home, too. I wonder if you would get very much bored with it,' she went on, looking at him critically. 'Yes, I expect you would.'

'I wouldn't be bored,' Heaton retorted, with righteous indignation. 'I think *you* might be. You see, I have done with all the pomps and vanities, *etcetera*. There is a past in my life, but there's no future.'

'Oh, yes, there is! I am not going to believe anything so sad as that. If I were really your sister, and we were in the Spanish cottage, my

care would be to build over, with cobwebs or something to hide it away, that "haunted chamber" in your heart, as Owen Meredith calls it. I am so sorry for you. I believe I know how it must feel, though I am very sure I never was in love myself. I hope it is not wicked to say so; I don't think so. I married when I was just a schoolgirl; and he was years older. He was so good to me, too,' she added, with quick self-reproach. 'And I did love him, in a way, for all his goodness to me, but not as you would understand love, I am sure.'

She laughed lightly, as she often did when she was really touched.

'I don't think that idyl of the Spanish cottage would do at all, though,' she resumed. 'Just think: what would people say to us?'

'I suppose it would not be quite absolutely strictly entirely conventional, would it?' he said, laughing. 'However, that does not matter a bit, you know — for Spain.'

'Oh, no, not for Spain; of course it does n't,' she agreed, laughing too. Then, in her quickly changing way: 'Oh dear, dear! Mr. Heaton — or, George, is it to be? — what a dreadful lot of

nonsense we have been talking! Here come Emily and James, too. Poor Emily! James had one of his bad times last night with his lung, and then Emily has bad times too. Emily is so good to him; you don't know. James is so funny. With all his faults, he is very religious — you see, they have just been to church now. Well, I have known him go on gambling night after night on the Continent, making poor Emily perfectly miserable, and then on Sunday he would start off for the nearest Protestant Church as if he was the most model man and husband in the world.'

'Good morning, Mrs. Whitstable, I must ask you to forgive my secular appearance,' Heaton said, as the two pairs met. 'A soft cap looks so very profane, I am afraid.'

'Yes,' observed Mr. Whitstable. 'Felt or silk is acknowledged to be the most pleasing head-covering to the higher powers. I don't know why better than tweed.'

'Well, James, what sort of a sermon did you have?' his sister-in-law asked.

'Well, it was quite a revelation to me that Lifport was such a hotbed of aggressive atheism — eloquent, not much argument. And

what have you two been talking about? Theology all the time?’

‘Oh, no, we’ve been talking profoundest sentiment, haven’t we?’ Heaton said, laughingly, turning to Mrs. Elton.

‘Ah! sentiment!’ Mrs. Whitstable echoed. ‘You won’t find much of that in Nelly, Mr. Heaton. I don’t believe Nelly has a particle of sentiment in her composition.’

The next day Heaton was leaving Lifport to pay a few days’ visit to his friend and *quondam* tutor, Parson Passmore, at Brentleigh.

CHAPTER III

THE BROWN BREAD TRAY

BRENTLEIGH village was probably the smallest village in the world. It consisted of three cottages, a disused shoeing smithy, a public-house, and a church. But the parish of Brentleigh, whose spiritual needs were attended to in this little whitewashed church with its little slits of windows close up to the roof, was an extensive though sparsely populated district. Within its bounds was the home of the famous Squire Venn; and that celebrated building, Venn's Folly, was quite close to the village itself. The inhabitants of the country all round were tenant farmers of Squire Venn, or their dependants.

But the present Squire was not the man his grandfather, who had built the Folly, had been; so they all said. Impartial opinion pronounced him mad; and his own people, though ready

to raise a brawny fist on the man who dared question their Squire's sanity, were equally apt with such stories of his eccentricities as sufficiently attested the unrighteousness of their wrath. At all events, for stag, and salmon, and black game, and wild-duck he cared not at all; but was a home-stayer, such as none of his forefathers had been before him.

The glory had departed from Brentleigh village too, as had the lustre of the spirit of enterprise from the house of Venn. In old days that dismantled forge, with its leaky bellows, had ever shown a cheerful blaze, and horses, like a string of wild-duck, had been seen waiting their turn there, while their masters discussed many matters, in the broadest Devonshire, round the cider-tap of the 'Brow, Bay, and Tray.' In these days this shoeing forge was in great renown.

But now the chase of the red deer but seldom attracted sportsmen so far to the northward and westward, and the farmers found it more convenient to put a different horse between the shafts of the spring-cart each market-day, and take the chance of having him indifferently shod in the market-town. For none ever pre-

sumed that their horses would, so, be shod after the manner of shoeing of the old landlord of the 'Brow and Bay.'

But a new landlord, a nephew who had bought the business, had now for some time reigned in the stead of the old farrier; and he knew nothing of horse-shoeing, nor of stag-hunting, had even allowed the good old sporting name of the house to be corrupted into the 'Brown Bread Tray;' by which sign it was now generally known, though its *habitués* were still cognizant of its derivation.

The new landlord was an astute-looking little man, with a beard. He had tried most trades, it appeared, in most countries; but principally he had been a sailor on a merchant-man. The business prospered with him, though he had changed the old name and dropped the horse-shoeing. He could tell his customers stories they liked to hear of foreign countries; not quite true, perhaps, all of them, but they did not know that; and, above all, his cider was as excellent a tap as ever at the old 'Brow and Bay,' and his spirits were quite as cheap, and a deal better, so the less conservative of his customers ventured to say.

Of the three cottages in the village, two were in possession of laborers on Squire Venn's estate. In the third lived a man whose glorious physique the pen of Charles Kingsley would have delighted to honor. He was of immense height and immense breadth of shoulder, and clean-limbed, with features faultlessly beautiful, and a short golden beard. His eyes were the brightest blue. But, young as he was, he had a stoop with those tremendous shoulders of his such as is rarely seen in any but the oldest men; and he smelt strongly of the compound odor of tobacco and fish. He was a fisherman, and dressed in fisherman's clothes; but why he lived in Brentleigh, and not at Galsworthy, the fishing village a mile down the coast, where he always put in with his trawler, nobody, except those whom it concerned, knew.

Now, here you have the heads of the families that lived in the village of Brentleigh — but by no means all the population; for each man was blessed with a wife and a large number of children, all shrill-voiced, who lived less in the cottages than in the road, and played hide-and-seek in and out of the old broken forge bellows, and were only preserved by a special providence

from drowning in the duck pond at the turn of the road. For Brentleigh was at a meeting of three roads; or, rather, where the road along the coast from Galsworthy to the market-town was joined by the road which led up past the Brown Bread Tray, right away through a huge coombe between the Exmoor hills, whence it branched off in many directions to many a town and hamlet unknown to fame.

And there was yet another man, a bachelor, who had lately taken up his abode at Brentleigh. You see, the old landlord of the Brow, Bay, and Tray had done business in the veterinary line. His death, then, left an opening, of which a young man who had taken a lodging at the Brown Bread Tray, as we must call it, conformably to modern usage, was striving to avail himself. He usually wrote a number of letters, ending with V. S., after his name; and as people forgot the former ones, they omitted them; and as they were not familiar with the last two in such a connection, they substituted for them the two most like them with which they *were* familiar — with the result that the new veterinary surgeon was generally spoken of as the ‘cow-doctor, V. C.’ As he got but

little practice, he did not do much harm. He was frequently drunk, and at all times ejaculatory and incoherent in his manner of speech.

Now Heaton had not written to tell Parson Passmore of his intention of honoring him with a visit; and it so happened that when Heaton arrived in a hired vehicle from Kingstock Road, at the parsonage, the parson was in the parlor of the Brown Bread Tray.

The parlor looked very dull. There were three deal benches and a deal table in it. On the table was a brass tobacco box, divided by a partition into two halves. A penny dropped into one part opened the lid of the other, and the tobacco became available. On the wall there was a picture of the prize-fight between Sayers and Heenan, and on the floor there was some sand. Outside, a warm, wet, silent mist shut out the landscape.

Besides the parson, the landlord and the big fisherman were in the parlor. They were all smoking moodily. The parson was engaged in a physiognomic study, silently putting his finger under each ill-favored face in turn of the Sayers *v.* Heenan picture. The others sat vacantly watching him. When he left off, the

cessation was regarded with tacit disfavor. When he moved to the door, their eyes followed him uneasily. All three were suffering from having nothing to do, and no bright sun to do it in.

Suddenly the parson exclaimed, 'I hear some one. Cow-doctor, I think.'

The others joined him at the door, silently incredulous. After a minute, though, they certainly heard a voice; certainly, too, the cow-doctor's.

'D——d disagreeable, muddy roads, I mean to say, wha'?' the voice was heard ejaculating.

Presently two figures came out of the mist, one of which, when it came near enough to be recognizable, the parson sprang upon and nearly hugged in the warmth of his greeting.

It was, of course, Heaton whom the parson thus obstreperously welcomed. He was led into the sanded parlor and introduced all round. The gigantic fisherman, he found, possessed the little tiny name of Joey Dart. He was introduced to the landlord by the name of Major, and to the landlady, who was summoned through a swing-door from the private premises

by a 'Bring out the parson's chair, Mary,' from her worser half.

The parson's chair was a high, round-backed wooden one, the back looking as if it had originally been made for a bird-cage; uncushioned it was, but it seemed to fit one, notwithstanding, Heaton thought, as he settled himself within the capacious arms and began unobtrusively taking stock of the company. He was himself fairly cosmopolitan in his tastes and sympathies, and could make to himself companions of all sorts and conditions of men; but he prepared to watch with interest, nevertheless, the relations between his old friend, the rough old cleric, and the uncultured intelligences he found about him.

'Are you an army man?' he asked the landlord, as he brought him a mug of cider.

'Oh, no, sir! Major's my *name*,' answered the landlord, with conscious modesty. 'I did serve in the army one time, too—— Good afternoon! Mary, two brandies, hot,' he broke off, as two coastguardsmen from Galsworthy came in and greeted the company all round with a circular nod—'Out in America that was,' he continued his reminiscences, 'in the North and South

War. I and another chap we joined; and the next day it was bounty day. So the Colonel he made us a speech; he said — “We ’re the Maryland Bloody Third, boys. We never have been beat, and we never shall be beat.” Then he gave out the bounty all round. So the next day I and my pal, we thought it would be a long while before next bounty day, so we deserted.’

‘What sort of way of going on d’ ye call that, then? D’ ye call that honest?’ the parson asked gruffly.

‘No, I don’t then; nor you would n’t be honest out there neither. Or if you were, you ’d have to beg your bread — and would n’t get it. I thought you said it was no sin, you thought it, to rob them as would rob you,’ said the landlord, evidently with some secret significance.

‘Dem! stop that, I tell ye,’ cried the parson, jumping up from his chair and standing before the little man, looking very big and wrathful.

‘Dasey, parson, I ’m all right! D’ you think I ’m a fool?’ the landlord expostulated, with mild indignation; whereat the parson’s wrath abated, and after a whisper in the landlord’s ear he resumed his seat.

‘ Mary, another button!’ he shouted; and the company of the Brown Bread Tray laughed loudly, as it had done at this joke for years. For the parson’s method of keeping his score, which he did himself, was to unfasten a waistcoat button for each glass; and when he reached the top button he began buttoning up again. This laid the foundation for many a pleasant joke at the Brown Bread Tray, of which ‘ tidily drunk,’ ‘ untidily drunk,’ may respectively be taken as fair samples. Not that the parson was ever seen drunk, whether tidily or untidily; but that was not for want of trying, but from sheer hard-headedness and strength of stomach.

Mary, the little landlord’s wife, like the wives of most little men, was a very large woman — ‘ Got a tongue, awful; eh, wha’, I mean to say?’ the cow-doctor confided in a whisper to Heaton, with a look of compassion towards Mr. Major, doubtless in some measure inspired by a fellowship in suffering.

When Mary had brought the parson’s ‘ button,’ the cow-doctor addressed her in as conciliatory a manner as his gasping style of utterance would permit.

‘ Growing fine, these mangolds of yours, Mrs. Major; eh, wha’, I mean to say? ’ he remarked, indicating with his thumb a large field of roots, the only prospect the mist left visible from the parlor window.

‘ Ees fai’, my dear,’ the woman answered maternally; ‘ they ’ve agot nothing else to do. — Now, you daring rascal!’ she exclaimed, with sudden, shrill fury, to her eldest born, who was pulling Perro’s tail in the doorway, ‘ can’t ye leave the gentleman’s dogue alone? ’

‘ Oh, he won’t hurt,’ Heaton said, horrified at the woman’s outburst on such slight cause.

But the child regarded the rebuke but lightly. The ‘ daring rascal ’ came up to Heaton, and looking at him wonderingly, asked, ‘ Please, sir, what sort of dogue is ’un, smell dogue or pleasure dogue? ’

Heaton was relieved of the necessity of an answer by a hawklike descent on the part of the mother, who snatched up the child with an exclamation of ‘ Oh, my tender!’ and bore him off as regardless of her caresses as he had been of her reproof.

And now two farmers came tramping in, exhaling warmth and smell and damp mist,

and sat down to something hot, having hitched up their horses in a rough stable behind.

‘Us have been round to see the old Squire Venn on a matter of business, us have; and if he bain’t mad, if Squire Venn bain’t, why, if he bain’t — there!’

It was clearly hopeless for the farmer to attempt to conceive the relations of phenomena in a world where Squire Venn could be regarded as otherwise than insane.

‘Mad! Squire Venn mad! Why, he bain’t no more mad than what I be,’ said a voice at the door. It was that of the tenant of one of the Brentleigh cottages, and he worked for Squire Venn.

‘Oh, he bain’t mad, bain’t he? Squire Venn bain’t! How do you know as he bain’t mad?’

‘’Cause I know very well as he bain’t, and ’cause I’ve aworked for ’un myself. Squire Venn mad! Why, he bain’t no more mad than what I be. Funny gentleman he was, too,’ continued the speaker, led away by his recollections from the immediate point at issue. ‘I mind one time as ’e ’ad two live swans down on the pond afore ’ees ’ouse. So, one fine day, he comes along; ups with his gun,

shoots the two live swans; 'as two wooden ones made. "Equal so good reflection on the warter," says 'e; but there — mad! He bain't no more mad than what I be.'

'Another time, I mind, as he went out into 'ee's garden and digged four little holes down in the ground; tilled 'ee's old tom-cat into 'em. "Have a fine crop of young cats come the spring-time," says 'e; but there — mad! He bain't no more mad than what I be.'

'Well, perhaps he bain't, then,' conceded the farmer, his conviction evidently somewhat shaken by the other's testimony.

'At all events, his politics is mad, if so be as he bain't mad hisself.'

'What are his politics?' Heaton asked.

'Well, sir, Liberal they calls 'em,' Mrs. Major answered, quickly taking up the question from her post by the swing-door. 'But I calls 'em Radical. I hope I bain't over close-handed myself, but in politics I'm a Conservative. What with no Church and no Queen, along of these here Radicals, us'll have no safety for put our nose outside the door.'

'I think I must send the old woman on the stump,' grinned her husband. 'I don't know

if she 'ld strike so hard as some, but, dasey! she 'ld let in three daps while another body's getting in 'ee's one.'

Of the two coastguardsmen, one was a new-comer to Galsworthy. The Brown Bread Tray had hardly quite taken his measure as yet, and the eyes of the older members followed him curiously as he got up and went out with his telescope.

'Can't make 'un out quite,' said the remaining coastguard, in answer to a question from the parson. 'You can't get 'un to say very much. He always thinks as there's some work to be done; always spying about with his glass for smugglers or summat.'

'He is, is he?' the parson said softly. 'Conscientious, eh?'

'Ees; that's of it.'

'Quite right,' said the parson, still softly. 'Family man? Does his hat cover his family?'

'No; it don't cover his fam'ly, but it covereth all the sense in 'un, I do believe. He 'th agot a wife and just two or dree childern. 'Er's always ailing, 'er is, as it seems to me. I'd sooner, far, have any other woman as I know with twenty, I would.'

‘ You would? ’

He was a cheery little man, this coastguard, and a general favorite. He had a small, round, red face, with no features in particular, and his body was small and round, and probably red, likewise.

‘ No rain, I suppose, missus, with this here mist? ’ inquired the red man of Mrs. Major.

‘ No, Mr. Muxworthy. No rain, you may depend. ’Tis all for heat and pilchards, as they say down to my home, in Cornwall. Up here ’t is all herring; down there ’t is all pilchards.’

‘ If a herring and a half cost three halfpence, how much will twelve herrings cost? ’ the parson propounded solemnly to the company at large, as if he had just invented the problem.

‘ Ah, well, there now! herrings. I can’t hardly tell ye,’ Mrs. Major answered, accepting the challenge. ‘ If it had been pilchards, now, I could have told ye in a minute.’

‘ Dasey, then! There they go!’ exclaimed the landlord, as the two cats who did the mousing for the Brown Bread Tray came racing in under Perro’s nose and round the room at a gallop.

‘Do ye know what that there’s a sign of, sir?’ the landlady asked Heaton.

‘No! What?’

‘Why, it shows as there’ll be a high wind.’

‘Which way, missus?’ asked Joey Dart, the Herculean fisherman. It was his first contribution to the conversation since Heaton’s entrance.

‘Ah! that I can’t tell ye, my dear,’ Mrs. Major answered, with laudable honesty.

‘Us might fetch over to-morrow, parson?’ the giant ventured, interrogatively.

The parson’s reply was a gruff, discouraging one —

‘Now, Joe Dart, I did believe as your tongue had got one merit — that he did n’t wag too fast; but, dasey! he seem’th to have lost that one. Hold thee tongue, do ye hear? And don’t go listening to any more of them there old wives’ tales.’

The great fellow hung down his splendidly handsome head, most crestfallen, and the parson’s frown changed to a kindly grin as he looked at him.

‘Bring Captain Dart another “button,” Mary,’ he said, making the mystic sign on his waistcoat as he spoke.

Now, we have said that when Heaton first seated himself in the bird-cage-backed armchair, he expected an interesting study of the relations between the parson and the members of his flock in their solemn assembly in the bar-parlor of the Brown Bread Tray. His expectation had been more than fulfilled, and yet had in one sense been disappointed. For, while he viewed with interest the spectacle of the parson's unquestioned authority, he was baffled in all efforts to conceive the origin of an influence for which his friend's intellectual and social ascendancy did not sufficiently account. The occasions of the parson's wrath were also hard to comprehend. The landlord's remark, indeed, whereat he had taken offence, might possibly be considered as an imputation upon his teaching; but as to the fisherman's innocent suggestion — with reference, probably, to some proposed marine pleasure trip — what was there in it to make the parson's ready anger blaze?

The riddle was too hard for Heaton; and as he knew his friend too well to ply him with curious questions, he did not find the key to it for many a day.

Captain Dart, meanwhile, had accepted the

fluid, and a fresh fill of tobacco, in the silence which was usual with him, and Mary had temporarily retired within the privacy of the swing-door to pass a few remarks on the impropriety of speaking of judicious persons' observations as 'old wives' tales.' She could not question the parson's word, which was law in the Brown Bread Tray, as in most places of the parson's constant resort; but no other frequenter of the bar-parlor, who knew the volubility with which Mrs. Major so successfully supplied the place of argument, could have ventured to cast a doubt on the accuracy of her meteorological inductions.

'Mist's a-lifting,' observed the red-faced coastguard. 'Suppose that's why my pal's off; to see what he can find.'

'How a-lifting?' the parson inquired. 'Clearing off, or moving up?' He stepped to the window as he spoke. 'Oh, 't is moving up, I see. Look at it, Georgie, coming through the coombe.'

The low ground of Brentleigh and the base of the Exmoor hills were clear, but, higher up, the wreath of mist lay like a white comforter, and the heads of the taller hills topped the shallow

cloud of fog. Down through the coombe the white vapor came in volleying puffs, as if a great battle were going forward within these giant gates.

‘Fine, isn’t it, that?’ Heaton remarked. ‘It’s time we were moving up too, isn’t it? I suppose you can give me a shakedown for to-night?’

‘Well, I can, of a sort. ’Tisn’t much of it, but I suppose you’re not over particular.’

‘What’s that queer building?’ Heaton asked, when they got outside.

‘Oh, ’t is Venn’s Folly, that. Built by the old Squire next but one before this one. You can’t see the Squire’s house from here. Haunted, they say that there Folly is. That’s why no one’ll live there.’

‘Haunted! What by?’

‘Well, noises mostly, I believe. I never heard of any one seeing aught there. Anyway, the noises has been enough to drive away any that’s ever tried to live there.’

‘By Jove! Rats, I suppose. I should like to go and live there and try it.’

‘No, I shouldn’t advise ye to do that, Georgie,’ the parson said gravely.

‘Why, Jack, you old fool! You don’t believe in ghosts surely!’ Heaton exclaimed, looking at him with some surprise.

‘No, I don’t, I suppose,’ the parson agreed, shaking off his serious manner with a laugh. ‘Still I wouldn’t advise any man to take it. ’T is a lonely spot anyway.’

‘Oh! lonely! Yes, by oneself. One couldn’t live there alone hardly.’

‘Now I don’t know whether my place will do for ye or no,’ the parson said dubiously, looking at Heaton’s smart country suit. ‘I’ve only got one old woman in the house, and she’s pretty deaf and stupid; except old Kit, the retriever. Oh, never mind, though! Dasey! we’ll do well enough, man.’

And so they did do well enough, for most men. It is true the parson’s old woman was so deaf and idiotic that Heaton had to make all the arrangements of a very humble, uncarpeted, whitewashed room himself. It is true the parson had but one sitting-room which was dining-room as well. But, then, what a dinner they had!

The stupid old woman was a first-rate cook, in her own fashion, and served up a dish of

irresistible little trout, followed by a saddle of mutton, kept to an hour, dark as from a five-year-old wether, but small as from a lambkin of as many weeks. And the wine and spirits were right well worthy of such a bill of fare.

And this one sitting-room, too; what a room it was! Such an emporium of trophies and mementoes of the chase as there is no space nor time to describe. There were stags' heads, and foxes' masks and brushes, and badgers' skins, and otters' skins, and a stuffed bull-trout, and various stuffed albinos of the bird-kind, and stuffed owls and hawks and vermin, and, least of all, perhaps, but by no means least interesting, a specimen of the old English black rat, looking very small and effete beside the Scandinavian invader. Hung around, too, were a medley of implements of the chase, such as guns and hunting-crops, and an old hunting-horn, and fishing-rods and baskets; and, on the table, flybooks and spurs and heterogeneous leather straps and buckles; and, on the mantelpiece, dog-medicines and horse-balls. Of books there were but few, and what there were, mostly classical and in the dead lan-

guages. The Bible and a work on Navigation were the only two in English.

In this room, after dinner, round a small fire, sat five individuals in a semicircle. On either side of the fireplace sat Perro and Kit, regarding each other gravely; Perro's aspect expressive of the respectful deference which he felt to be due to the old lady's years. Next to Perro sat his master, and next to Kit sat hers. Between them lay, stretched at full length, a rough, white terrier, a valued gift to our Parson Jack from a brother 'Parson Jack,' much more widely known to fame.

'Slippers, Kit!' the parson said, as he drew his chair nearer the fire; and the wise old dog tumbled upstairs and returned with the slippers in her mouth. She was always lame with rheumatism in one leg or the other, so much of her life had been spent in the water.

'She's the only thing of womankind I ever loved; aren't ye, my old sweetheart?' said the parson, laying his hand on her broad head. 'Look at her! She's wise! Knows as much as any two men, and what she don't know bain't worth learning,' he added in the usual formula.

When the parson had made his feet com-

fortable, they sat for some time in silence. Then Heaton, from some secret hiding-place, brought out a locket. He undid the back of it, and took out a dingy scrap of cutting from a newspaper, evidently many months old. He read over the printed words. They were these. "On July —, 18—, at Brentleigh, Devon, Agneta Etheredge, aged 28 years.'

Heaton handed the slip of paper to his friend. The parson read it, and, as he gave it back in silence, looked in Heaton's face and nodded.

'Here? In the churchyard?' Heaton asked.

The parson again nodded; and then they relapsed into their former silence, which Heaton at length broke by a remark on the less well known of his host's two English volumes.

'Whatever are you doing with *Navigation*, Jack?'

'Oh, nothing,' said the other indifferently; 'only I go out with Joey Dart in his trawler sometimes.'

Next morning the parson saw his guest start off by himself, and watched him go round the little church to the small cemetery behind it. How long he was there, or what he did, the parson did not know, for before Heaton came

back he had gone down to the Brown Bread Tray for his morning rum and milk. When he returned he found his friend inspecting the stables.

Everything on the parson's establishment, except one young horse, was well up in years. His idiotic indoor woman was old; his retriever and his terrier were old; and his groom and his favorite horse and the two cats in the stable were all old; and they all loved each other like members of a real happy family. The old stableman took a pride in showing off 'old Charlie horse's' tricks. He set to, to groom him, whereon 'Charlie horse,' gently removing the old man's hat in his mouth, and hanging it on a nail in the wall, returned the compliment by licking all over the bald old head thus discovered.

So, too, when Kit returned wet from shooting, the parson used to turn her into Charlie's box, and the old horse would lick her over till she was dry and presentable for the drawing-room. And the cats ran about among and over the horses and dogs and men without a thought of fear. It all struck Heaton as very homely and very pleasant.

‘What’s the weather going to do, Jack? You don’t seem to have a glass about the shop,’ Heaton said.

‘Glass! What sort of glass? Barometer, d’ you mean? Dasey! they bain’t much better than Mrs. Major’s cats. ’T is going to be fine and showery. Any man can see that without a barometer.’

‘I don’t know which is worse, you or Mrs. Major,’ Heaton remarked. But the parson declined to be inveigled into argument.

In the course of the day Heaton went over to look at Venn’s Folly. Of all the many so-called ‘Follies’ which human caprice has planted on hill and headland, perhaps few are less deserving of their uncomplimentary sobriquet than the Folly perpetrated by Venn.

It is true that from the road beside the Brown Bread Tray it presented a tower-like and uninhabitable aspect; but this was because a rising bosom of land hid from view the lower part of the building, the structure of which, though curious, appeared to Heaton not incompatible with convenience and comfort. On external inspection, which alone was possible, for the house was locked and the windows shuttered,

he was disposed to think highly of the taste evinced by the ghost who had chosen to make Venn's Folly its exclusive residence. And over the probable nature of this ghost he puzzled long, but uselessly; more especially over that attribute of it whereby it had impressed Parson Passmore not only with a sense of its reality, but also, as it appeared, with a sense of its dangerous power.

Whether in consequence or no of the behavior or misbehavior of Mrs. Major's cats, a stiffish breeze had arisen; and as Heaton looked from the door of the Folly over the sea, it seemed to his fancy more like an interminable field of mowing grass, wind-swept under a dark sky, than like a fluid body. The Folly was within two hundred yards of the shore; but the view of the nearer sea, where the waves could be heard breaking, was intercepted by the ground rising slightly towards the cliffs, which at this spot were lower than elsewhere, but which increased continually in height and grandeur towards the north, till they culminated in the lofty, precipitous head known as Brent Foreland.

Behind the Folly, waste moorland and scanty

pasture, with here and there patches of low covert of gorse and brushwood, and clumps of stunted and wind-worn elms and firs, reached away towards the heather which clothes the lower slopes of Exmoor.

It was a desolate scene, indeed; but it worked with a strange attraction on the vein of melancholy in Heaton's nature. He thoughtfully went his way back through the little churchyard, where he paused a while before a tombstone. He picked a tiny little wild-flower from the grave and placed it in his locket, and then passed through into the village, and so on to the Parsonage.

The next morning he prevailed on his parson friend to come back with him to Lifport.

CHAPTER IV

A PROPOSAL

‘WELL, there! ’T is six years since last I was in Lifport, and it don’t seem altered, not one speck of paint,’ the parson said to Heaton as the omnibus of the ‘Royal’ pulled up at the latter’s lodgings.

The following day Heaton found his persuasive powers taxed to their utmost by the task of inducing the parson to face the ordeal of introduction to the ladies next door. But at length, by applying the ‘*non vi, sed sæpe cadendo*’ method, by which that classic drop of water made a hole in a stone, he succeeded in extracting a single ‘Aye;’ which he accepted as an answer in preference to a few score of antecedent ‘Noes,’ and hurried the parson off while the acquiescent humor was upon him.

Heaton himself, be it noted, felt the least in

the world anxious about the introduction. He was very jealous for his *old* friend, and, though he hated and despised himself for doing so, could not help feeling an occasional misgiving about the impression he would produce on his *new* friends. He had this feeling, notwithstanding a knowledge that beneath his roughness the parson had a real respect for women-kind, besides a kindliness which had endeared him to every creature weaker than himself, whether woman, child, or dumb animal, that had ever crossed his path; and notwithstanding, also, a tolerably assured conviction that his lady friends were neither too young nor too foolish not to be able to read the *man* beneath the garment of frieze.

So little neat Mr. Whitstable put his head on one side, like a little bird, and looked up through his eyeglass, with much kindly curiosity, at the shaggy, strong face which met his with an expression of shrewd geniality; and the ladies received the parson graciously, and the parson responded with subdued heartiness in a subdued Devonshire accent which took their fancy.

‘Does n’t he look at you straight? I like him so much,’ said Mrs. Elton enthusiastically

to Heaton; thereby filling his heart with quick joy and gratitude for her appreciation.

While the parson talked to the two ladies, Mr. Whitstable drew Heaton into a corner and confided to him very gravely: 'Ah! I've got to tell you—I've become quite the tennis-player since you've been away. I've been practising hard each day. And I smoke Lawn Tennis Mixture, and my wife's making me a pair of slippers with tennis things on them.' I've found out a secret about it; it's all a matter of diet! Pork is the thing you should eat; pork is best for "volleying;" but I'm not quite sure yet about "service;" I think porridge is the thing for that—anything that begins with a "p," do you see?'

À propos of which, Mrs. Whitstable suggested a stroll up to the tennis-ground till tea-time; and the little party set out, leaving Mr. Whitstable at home, for he was again having trouble with his lung, which he ascribed not so much to the lawn tennis as to the system of training he had adopted for it.

As Mrs. Elton both walked and talked eagerly, Mrs. Whitstable and Heaton soon dropped a little behind.

‘Tell me about Mr. Passmore. Has he never been married?’

‘What, Jack!’ Heaton answered with a laugh at the very idea. ‘No, never. I don’t think he has ever known what it is to love, even ever so little, in his life. And you see, dear old fellow, he’s not the sort of man many women would care to marry.’

‘Oh, dear, dear, dear! Mr. Heaton! what a lot of wiseacres you men are about us poor women. I wonder what your idea is of the sort of man we should like to marry. Now I should think that your parson friend is *just* the sort of man a woman could devote her life to. You would not understand the feeling — no man of course ever can know what it is to a woman to feel alone in the world, to have no one to lean on; and a man like your parson seems such a tower of strength to a poor, weak woman.’

Mrs. Whitstable’s voice had a little ring of melancholy in it.

‘Ah! I’m sorry!’ Heaton said, almost involuntarily.

‘Oh, I was not speaking at all of myself,’ she said quickly. ‘Did you think I was?’ she

asked, looking at him in a studying way she had.

‘No, no! I am sorry, I mean, for all lonely women,’ said Heaton, trying to rectify his mistake.

‘Well, well, I do feel lonely sometimes, I admit, Mr. Heaton,’ came from Mrs. Whitstable as a result of her study of him. ‘Of course I ought not to. Do you think Mr. Passmore ever feels lonely?’ she asked, skilfully turning the conversation.

Heaton replied that he thought the parson was tolerably self-sufficing. He might have added, only Mrs. Whitstable would not have understood it, that he depended largely on the society of Kit.

Perro was running on in advance of the other two.

‘George ever tell ye how he got Perro?’ the parson asked Mrs. Elton.

‘No. Tell me.’

‘I might have known that. He ’ld never tell ye. Don’t see why I should n’t, though. But you must n’t tell *folks*,’ said the parson warningly, with a vague toss of his head to indicate the *profanum vulgus*.

Smothering a little glow of wrath kindled by the idea that such a caution should be necessary, Mrs. Elton promised secrecy.

And then the parson told a very plain, unvarnished tale of how, in the northern lawless part of Mexico, a marauding band of cow-boys had attacked a peaceful ranch; how the cattle had been driven off, and the inmates forced to fly for their lives; how, in the flight, a man fell sick, and there remained behind with him his wife and her infant child and his dog, and of all his comrades none, save one, an Englishman who was reported to be prospecting the country — Heaton. He told how the English stranger stood by them and helped them, in peril of their lives, till the man died; and how he mounted the woman and the child on his own horse, and, himself walking, brought them at length, half-dead from hunger and exposure, to a township where they had friends. His dog, Perro, the only thing he had to leave away, the dying Mexican had bequeathed to the Englishman who had stood by him so truly to the end.

It was a simple tale enough, as the parson narrated it.

‘It don’t sound much, told like that,’ he remarked apologetically. ‘But when you put in the risk, and the hunger, and the wakings at nights, and the wishing he was back home again, and so forth, you ’ll find it don’t come so very far short of a bit of heroism, Mrs. Elton.’

That Mrs. Elton was indignant that the parson should have thought it necessary to point out to her the occasion for enthusiasm, it needs not to say. Nor is it in any way wonderful, but perhaps just what was to be expected, that she should relieve her feelings by hugging Perro more fervently than she had ever done yet, and by not a word of compliment to Heaton on the subject.

Instead, she began to take him to task, as she walked homeward with him, and they drew, as was usual with her, well ahead of the others.

‘No, no! I see it is no good, I am not getting on at all in this friendship race. We were talking and walking together for weeks, you and I, and you never told me about Perro; and you just go away for a day to your real friend and tell him all about it straight away.

‘About Perro? What, how I got him, do you mean? Why, it never struck me. I never

thought to,' he answered, quite honestly, for the light in which she might view the action did not occur to him even now.

'Oh, no! you 'ld have told me a thing like that if I had been a real friend; if I had been a sister you would. No, I shall never make even a dead-heat of it, I see. I am going to give it up.'

'Oh, but you mustn't; you have promised. I'm not going to let you give it up. I want you to make a dead-heat of it. You almost — I think you *have* made a dead-heat of it.'

'Have I?' she said, with a little sceptical smile. 'No, no, I don't think I have, Mr. Heaton — oh, George, brother I mean. I know very well, really, it can never be the same as with a man.'

'Ah, yes, but that's just what it can, in my case, Nelly.' He spoke the Christian name shyly; it was almost the first time.

'Ah, well, my brother, so be it. I hope it may. I should like you to be like that to me. But, you know, I'm not quite satisfied with the idea of the dead-heat, even. I don't like sharing with some one else. I want to be first if I am to be anything. I am very greedy.'

‘Nelly, you know,’ began Heaton, rehearsing the articles of his belief. ‘You know, I have told you, that I did once love a woman with all the strength that a man can love with; and it is not possible that any woman can ever be to me again what that woman was. But if you will be a very dear friend to me,’ he went on, turning his eyes frankly to Mrs. Elton’s face as he spoke — but he came to a dead full stop before the expression he saw there.

It was quite an unintelligible expression to him; an expression of horror and shame. It found full utterance in the tone in which she exclaimed ‘Mr. Heaton!’ as she turned abruptly round and walked back to her sister and the parson.

There was nothing for Heaton but to turn and walk back after her, as utterly bewildered as if he was in a dream.

But there was no opportunity of explanation or question vouchsafed to him on the way home. Mrs. Elton kept religiously beneath her sister’s wing and treated him with most deadly politeness.

Heaton was but poor company that evening, and the parson went off early to bed, leaving

his host to unpleasant meditations. He admitted to himself that he was becoming much attached to Mrs. Elton, in true brotherly fashion, and was seriously distressed at this cloud which had thus suddenly and unaccountably chilled the warm growth of a friendship which had seemed to promise so much.

The following day Mrs. Elton again clung with the same persistency to her sister's chaperonage. All Heaton's subtle plans for a *tête-à-tête* interview were foreseen and outmanœuvred. But, circumstanced as they were, this could not last for ever, and in the end his perseverance was rewarded. When the moment came he knew that it would be a trying one, but he was far too much in earnest to think of shirking it.

'Do you know you have n't been attending to the cobwebs and the dead ashes and the haunted chamber much, lately?' he said, desperately trying to ignore the difficulty.

Mrs. Elton answered hurriedly and decidedly.

'Oh, no, Mr. Heaton, please!' she said. 'We won't talk about these things any more. It was all nonsense.'

‘Do you mean to say then that our friendship is to be at an end?’

‘Oh dear, no. I hope not,’ she answered lightly. ‘Only I am not going to talk any more nonsense about cobwebs and relationships and so on.’

‘Well, of course it was nonsense in a way, I admit,’ Heaton said, rather irrelevantly. ‘But I do think it would be only fair if you would give me some idea of the reason of this sudden change that you have decreed.’

‘Mr. Heaton, that is folly, if you will forgive my saying so. You *must* know the reason.’

‘Mrs. Elton,’ he replied, with some warmth, ‘I assure you on my word of honor that I have not the faintest conception. To me it is perfectly unintelligible.’

Mrs. Elton looked at him for a moment.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘I must believe you; and I suppose I ought to tell you — oh! I *can't* tell you,’ she said impatiently, in her quick way. ‘But I did think *you* would not misunderstand me — there! do you not see?’

‘No, indeed, I don't,’ poor Heaton answered, in terrible anxiety to catch her meaning.

‘Why, I told you — don't you remember? —

when we were talking nonsense about the dead-heat and that, that I wanted to be first; and then you told me — don't you see? — you told me that no woman could ever be to you again what that other was. Oh! — don't you see how it looked?' she said, turning away her face.

'Oh God!' Heaton exclaimed, with a sort of inarticulate moan. 'Did it look to you like that? See? — of course I see; blockhead and fool that I was! Oh, Mrs. Elton, how ever can I apologize to you enough? I don't believe I ever thought how it would sound to you; my thoughts were far, far away. What I meant was that it was hardly possible for any one to be a greater friend to me than Jack Passmore is.'

'Mr. Heaton, we can settle this matter very easily. Can you honestly and truthfully say that you did not think for a moment that I wished to be — to be anything more than a very good friend to you?'

It was a brave speech, and Heaton felt it as such.

'Yes, indeed — indeed I can,' he answered eagerly.

'Then,' she said, frankly holding out her

hand, 'I was very, very silly, and I ask you to forgive me. But you do not know what it would be to a woman to have it thought — well, as I thought you thought for a moment. She would wish to sink into the ground.'

And so the danger was passed over, and the course of their friendship again flowed placidly on.

'Do you and Mr. Heaton call each other by your Christian names?' Mrs. Whitstable asked her sister when they were alone one evening, soon after this threatened rupture.

'Yes, Emily,' Mrs. Elton answered, with a little blush. 'We have adopted a sort of brotherly and sisterly relationship. It's rather nonsense, isn't it?' she added apologetically.

The elder sister did not answer immediately. Then she said affectionately:

'Are you quite sure of yourself, dear?'

'Sure? Oh, Emily, yes! Don't you know I have n't a bit of sentiment in me? Ask James.'

'Ah, poor James! But he might be mistaken, you know, dearie. It's a dangerous game,' she went on, with an air of conviction. 'I don't believe in it myself,' she said hardly.

‘ And then, too, Mr. Heaton is a man a woman might well love; if the thing called love is not *all* false, as I rather believe it is. He is so kind and so gentle and so strong. Take care of yourself, dear; that’s all I’ve got to say.’

Her tone was far kinder than the words, and as she spoke them she came over and kissed her sister almost maternally.

‘ You dear old thing! Yes; I’ll take care,’ Mrs. Elton promised; and they said good-night.

Mrs. Whitstable went to her room thoughtfully. She knew that her younger sister had her ‘moods and tenses’ just as she herself had, though with such power of natural spirits to overcome them as made them hard to credit.

‘ Well, well! It may be all right for Nelly; but,’ she concluded, with a little sigh, ‘ it would not do for me.’

And then she set herself to pay attention to Mr. Whitstable’s little foibles. She was a good woman, and acted almost an Electra’s part to her ‘husband, whom it might have been possible perhaps to love, but scarcely to respect, when he suffered the torments of

mental struggle with the fiend of the fever of gambling, or the physical tortures of the fiend who probed and worried at his diseased, useless lung.

So the adopted brother and sister went on with little sketches of a fanciful future in which they were to go through the world hand in hand, like brother and sister, and yet all in all to each other.

‘It’s a sweet little dream,’ Mrs. Elton would say, as they talked it over for at least the twentieth time. ‘And none the less sweet for being quite impossible.’

They drew plans of their little ‘Spanish cottage,’ as they called it, on the sands, with quite a real dismay when they found that some such detail as kitchen or staircase had been omitted; and they covered it with creepers, which should grow in about a week: a sofrano rose on one side of the porch, and a devoniensis on the other, and white jasmine everywhere: and they arranged and rearranged the furniture any number of times daily. There should be a little turret in one corner of the drawing-room, wherein should fit a circular sofa, and whence little diamond-latticed windows should

open on the most exquisite view. Then there should be another window, whether bow or French was a subject of very serious discussion, on another side. A dado, perhaps, would be nicer than a common paper. Oh, yes! and rugs, and no carpet, on the floor. And the fireplace must be a large, open one, with dogs, and a great carved white mantelpiece over it. And there would be bowls of *pot pourri* about, and screens and pictures. Oh, and the piano! that should be near the door — yes; and the tea-table should go in the turret.

‘Oh!’ Mrs. Elton used to conclude enthusiastically, ‘what a dear little home I could make of it!’

And so their friendship progressed on this happy wise, as it appeared to both of them, all through the summer months, until it one evening occurred to Heaton to take himself definitely to task, and to ask himself ‘What did it all amount to?’ What was it to be in his life — this close friendship that had come into it? Was it to be but a passing gleam and then to be dissolved in shadow — its ties severed, as friendship’s ties are most apt to

be, when the Whitstables and Mrs. Elton left Lifport? He writhed, with the knowledge of his impotence, under these restrictions of society which made it nigh impossible that between a man and woman so situated any friendship should be permanent. Had this new-found friend been a man, it would have been all so simple and easy; and why should it seem so utterly impracticable just because the friend was of the opposite sex? It appeared very, very hard to him.

Such cases had doubtless been frequently resolved before by the expedient of marriage — of a marriage not of love but of affection — but this, only as a tacit reservation, not, of course, as an expressed condition. But, in this particular case, he felt himself precluded from this solution. Mrs. Elton knew so much of his heart — knew, in fact, that he had no heart to give. She, too, so far from bearing him any love of that nature which alone is considered the necessary sanction and sanctification of marriage vows, had given unmistakable sign of horror when she had but imagined him to suspect her of some such sentiment.

Was there then no solution of it all? Was

this friendship, which he sincerely believed might be so potent a factor in the happiness of both their lives — might it but endure — to be dissipated, or at least weakened until it remained but as a memory, by their separation. Yes, there was indeed a solution of it which suggested itself to him, as an outcome of some of their conversational wanderings in the land of impossibilities. They might indeed live together, as brother and sister, were they but to satisfy social exigencies by a ceremony, which in their case would be indeed nothing else, of marriage. It suggested itself to him at first as a quite impossible consummation, no less impossible than devoutly to be wished. It was, of course, an impossibility. It would be a wickedness — so gross an outrage on social customs! And yet — and yet — the more Heaton dwelt on the proposition the less utterly monstrous did it grow to appear. Where, after all, was the wickedness of it? An outrage on social forms, it doubtless would be — though committed with the very object of satisfying them — but did it necessarily, therefore, contain in itself elements of wickedness, or of impossibility?

But then, again, could any man be justified in asking a woman to give to him her whole life on such terms? On first sight the proposal appeared most preposterous — unwarrantable. But then, he reflected, she had so often said to him, when they were planning their little ‘cottage in Spain,’ how sweet a home theirs might be. True, she was then but planning a fiction; and yet, presumptuous as he told himself it was, he could not but fancy there had been a certain unconscious undercurrent of sincerity in it all. And, for his own part, he honestly believed that he could make this woman’s life full and happy, on these conditions — just as if they had been really brother and sister.

Why should it not be so, he asked himself? Why should he not at least make the proposition? After all it would be for her to decide — a decision she was fully capable of making. She was no child, to be led away into unknown paths, but a woman who had had experience of married life — such experience, he told himself, as should enable her adequately to judge for herself in such a matter.

To arrive at the point of view from which

Heaton regarded the situation, it needs, too, to bear in mind the modification which a two years' sojourn on Mexican ranches would naturally effect on one's estimate of the value of the conventional rules of English life.

He went to bed having fairly made up his mind to advance this strange proposal; and to leave it in her hands to deal with the lives of both as she thought good. But on the morrow, in the morning, when we see all so clearly, in its prosaic light, as it is, rather than in the rosy tint of the as-it-might-be, then his misgivings, to call them by no stronger name, reawoke in full force. No, no, this outrage on the world's code could not be right — must be impossible. He must be silent, and let their friendship cement or dissolve itself as it would. No other were a possible course.

In silence, therefore, for a while, he possessed his soul, doubtful how to act, yet not so much vacillating in his resolution as refraining from a definite decision. And then, one evening in autumn, when the next-door neighbors had been discussing plans for their near departure, the loneliness of his position in the world came home to him with greater force than ever, and

with the desperate resolve, as he said to himself, of a suicide — giving himself no time for deliberation — he took up his destiny to lay it in other — in Mrs. Elton's — hands.

They were walking upon the level sands, and under the influence of the still evening and the hushing sound of the lapping water their conversation had taken an unusually serious turn, when Heaton said hurriedly, as if he could not trust his courage: 'Look here, Nelly! You know our dream. You know you have often said what a sweet dream it would be. Well, will you make it a reality?'

'What do you mean, George?' she asked, not fully understanding.

'Why, Nelly ——' he stopped abruptly and nervously for a moment, and then went on: 'Will you let me go on speaking till I tell you I have done, for I cannot explain it quickly, and you might misunderstand me?'

Mrs. Elton signified assent to the curious arrangement, and Heaton resumed — but slowly, and as if he were rehearsing a lesson: 'I want to ask if you will be married to me and will come and live with me for all our lives, and I will care for you with all the dearest affection

a brother can give a sister? To the world we should be husband and wife. Will you make trial with me of this 'Platonic affection'? I know it would seem I am paying you a very poor compliment in asking this, only that I know you understand that the power of love is burnt up out of my heart, so that I can give no more than this to any woman. I wish it were possible that on any other terms we might live so — together — so that you might not be bound. I believe that even now, in asking it, I am not asking a fair thing of you, but that shall be for you to decide.'

'Oh, George, dear!' she stammered, 'I don't know — what am I to say? You know I like you very much; love you — as a brother. It would be so strange. It wouldn't be right. Think of the marriage service.'

'There is such a thing as civil marriage.'

'Yes, but would that be right? I mean — of course it would be right, but would people call that all right?'

'To be sure they would, Nelly. But, there, don't answer me now. You are answering all at haphazard. Your wits, poor thing, are all scattered. I don't wonder at it; I know it is

an extraordinary proposal, and possibly a proposal I ought not to make, but I have thought over it very long and seriously, and I determined to make it and to leave the disposing of it with you. You think over it, Nelly, and tell me.'

That evening Mrs. Elton was very silent and thoughtful at dinner; that is, very unlike her usual self. After she had gone to her bedroom her sister came in. She went up to her and asked affectionately:

'What is it, dear? Anything?'

'Yes, I suppose it is something,' she said shyly. 'George Heaton has asked me to marry him.'

A colorless 'Oh' was the only answer.

'You don't seem very congratulatory, Emily,' the younger sister said with a little laugh.

'Oh, I—I hope you will be very happy,' Mrs. Whitstable answered in a strange constrained way, Nelly thought.

'You seem to take it for granted I accepted him,' she said.

'Didn't you?'

'No, I have not made up my mind. Emily, dear, you are not kind to me.'

Mrs. Whitstable gave a slight impatient

stamp with her foot, an angry stamp it seemed. But it was not with her sister that she was angry, for she answered by putting her arms round her neck and saying in quite a changed manner:

‘ Oh, yes, Nelly, dearie. Was n’t I kind to you? I did not mean it, dear. Yes, you will accept him, and I do wish you every happiness, every happiness in the world, with all my heart, dear.’

‘ I am not quite sure if I shall, Emily,’ Mrs. Elton said, as she put her hand into her sister’s and let it stay there. ‘ Emily, dear, I must tell you all about it.’

And Mrs. Elton, hesitatingly and conscious of a much greater difficulty in justifying the suggested position in the eyes of another than in her own, told all the story, tracing it up to its crisis in this most strange proposal. And then she waited with a little trembling to hear what her sister would have to say.

‘ And do you mean to say,’ Mrs. Whitstable cried, ‘ that he *dared* to offer you such a love as that? How *could* any man make such an offer to a woman and ask the devotion of her whole life in return?’

‘ He only asks for what he gives,’ Mrs. Elton pleaded gently.

‘ *He!* He has nothing else to give. *His* is a ruined life, a burnt-up heart, by his own showing. How can he dare to offer such dead ashes to a woman for her heart?’

She spoke with exceeding bitterness; so her sister thought.

‘ Emily, dear, he does not ask for my heart. I don’t think I have such a thing in my being, if he did. He only asks for the affection of a sister, and he gives me the affection of a brother.’

‘ And on that he asks you to marry him!’ Mrs. Whitstable answered, with a hollow laugh. ‘ Nelly, I — I cannot talk about this any more. Good-night.’ And she kissed her sister hastily and went away.

She went to her room. If her husband had been there she felt she would have borne it, but Mr. Whitstable was still in the smoking-room, and she broke down utterly. Yes, it had come at last — all with a rush — the thing she had been for the last fortnight indignantly denying when her mind, despite herself, hinted it to her. It was no good denying it any longer; this

man with his gentle ways of kindness, though he had ever been to her as to a mere society acquaintance, while he gave his friendship and his confidence to her sister, had nevertheless wound his way into her heart.

She was a woman whose life was regulated by a high sense of duty. While her impulses were perhaps less wholly good and lovable than those of her sister, hers was, perhaps, the more highly principled nature. Her goodness was less spontaneous, and, though she devoted herself to her husband with an almost perfect self-abnegation, it was possibly less a ministration of love than of duty; and it was impossible but that Heaton's never-failing consideration should make itself markedly felt in contrast with her husband's exacting selfishness.

Yes, it had come, and — it must begone. It was a shameful, ugly thing that had come into her life under the guise of something pleasant and bright and hopeful; it must begone. And the Mrs. Whitstable that her husband found when he came up from the smoking-room was the same Mrs. Whitstable as had left him half an hour before — agreeable, cynical, possibly even more attentively kind to his little wants

and petulances than ever; but what she had said to her heart in that short interval neither her husband nor any other mortal ever guessed.

For she went back to her sister, and petted her and talked to her of the strange, dangerous thing the future offered her, being more acquiescent, probably, in that sister's views than under other circumstances she would have been. For she refused to advise; bidding Nelly do as seemed best in her eyes; warning her only, and for ever, to be careful.

' Oh, do be careful, Nelly. The human heart is a fearfully dangerous thing to play tricks with, dear—a woman's heart more than all. It is well for him to say he has no heart; it may be so. But you, my dear,' said Mrs. Whitstable, smiling at her with all the wisdom of her few years of seniority. ' You, to think you have got no heart! Oh, pray to God, my dear, that you may never find your heart and feel it; and now, really this time, good-night.'

Mrs. Elton's final answer to George Heaton was this: ' Wait six months. On this day six months, if you are of the same mind, ask me again, and I think, if I am of the same mind, I shall say "Yes." '

Mrs. Whitstable could not feel sure enough of her motives to strive resolutely to dissuade her sister from this no-marriage. She felt very sure it ought not to be; Heaton ought never to have proposed it; Nelly ought never to have listened to it; yet, for all that, and although in general she was a clear-sighted and self-reliant woman, on this particular matter she could hardly trust herself to speak in protest.

In helpless indecision she watched the six months of her sister's probation rolling away.

CHAPTER V

THE COW-DOCTOR'S VISION

It was past St. Valentine's day, and the birds tugging away at the straws in the thatch of the Brown Bread Tray would have littered down the fragments on the heads of two men sitting below, only that an extension of the roof of the little porch formed a narrow veranda along the front wall and sheltered the bench beneath it from the drip of the eaves and from the debris sent down by matrimonially-intentioned sparrows.

The two men were Parson Passmore and the landlord, Mr. Major.

'There's a new tenant coming to Venn's Folly,' the parson was saying.

'Is there so?' said the little man, with the broadest of grins.

'Yes, there is,' the parson replied, apparently not sharing in his amusement. 'Friend of mine,' he added.

‘Friend of yours?’ echoed the other, with some surprise. ‘What do you bring a friend down there for? guess he’s not much of a friend—or else a friend altogether,’ he concluded, as if a new idea had struck him.

‘He’s friend altogether,’ the parson answered, with gruff impatience. ‘But not the way you mean. And I don’t mean him to be troubled with any ghosts and that, do ye see?’

‘No, I don’t,’ replied the other doggedly.

‘Well, then, I’ll tell ye, and then you will,’ said the parson imperatively rather than in explanation. ‘You see the old Squire Venn’s got in difficulties, short of money, do ye see? And he saith, fair enough, whether mad or no, he saith, ‘What’s the good to have Venn’s Folly there idle? Might have a tenant as would pay good rent. I mean to see what this here ghostie humbug means,’ he saith. Well, so happens that friend of mine thinks he’d like to take it same time; do ye see? So I’ve just arranged it with the old Squire Venn. ’Tis best to have a friend there—in case! And I don’t mean for my friend to be bothered with no ghosts and that, do ye see?’

The landlord nodded his head thoughtfully.

‘ And when ’s he coming in ? ’ he asked.

‘ Soon as house is ready. He ’s having alterations ; but I shall be about while that ’s doing. ’

‘ I hope you will,’ said Mr. Major, with an earnestness which was surely creditable to him in a matter apparently so remote from any personal interests, and then relapsed into meditative silence.

A few days after this short and rather obscure conversation, Heaton, for he it was that was to be the new tenant of the Folly, arrived at Brentleigh Parsonage in order to give instructions for the aforesaid alterations. The day following, there appeared on the scene a man who on his own showing combined in his single person the several functions of architect, house-decorator, and landscape gardener. On a former visit Heaton had obtained full permission from his landlord, the Squire of suspected sanity, to make such improvements as seemed to him requisite before entering upon his tenancy. And a sore trial he must have been to the versatile architect, etc. ; for he went into every detail of alteration and addition as no tenant had

ever been known to do before. In every particular Heaton designed that the Folly should be made, as nearly as the original structure of the building would admit, a facsimile of that æsthetic little cottage that had been planned so often on the Lifport sands. In one respect, at least, the fabric of the Folly lent itself very kindly to this scheme; for in the drawing-room he found the turret ready made for him. He planned a small porch and laid out a small garden; and, having written out, and drawn, and dinned into the ear of the architect, etc., the most elaborate and in some cases the most contradictory instructions, he left him to put them, so far as might be, into execution, under the supervision of Parson Passmore.

It was Heaton's first essay in house-holding, and the assurance of the parson that the drains and the water supply were in most excellent order sufficed for him upon that head.

The polymechanic architect (if the adaptation of so appropriate an Odyssean epithet be excusable) found the parson a surprisingly zealous and useful coadjutor; for the parson knew, and could lay hands on, all the most

skilful local labor — most notably in the person of a stone-mason out of Galsworthy, whose chief business was with the basement of the Folly. and who did his work with a will despite a certain invigorating marine and piscine odor which clung about his person.

The cow-doctor, too, would frequently stroll up to the Folly, usually in the parson's absence, and inspect progress with a view to reporting on the same to Mr. Major.

The bar-parlor of the Brown Bread Tray was indeed just now most ripe with news and speculation:

‘Would the new tenants be driven out by ghostesses?’

The answer to this was a gruff, scornful, ‘No! ghosts, no!’ from the parson; but still opinions were divided.

‘What sort of folk would the new tenants be?’

Answer: ‘Friends of parson;’ which usually put a stop to further conjecture.

‘What were Squire Venn's legal difficulties?’ Answer — or rather suggestion, a little vaguely put forward by the cow-doctor — ‘Chancery, perhaps, I mean to say, wha’?’; a conclusion

which was pretty generally held to be correct, not so much out of deference to the cow-doctor's opinion as because nobody knew what Chancery meant; though the ever-ready Mrs. Major did hazard a guess that it was so called because it was a great chance if you ever got anything out of it.

The cow-doctor, by virtue of some unlucky idiosyncrasies, was drawing a good deal of attention to himself. He was a mechanical genius; at least he said so. In the summer he had constructed a really ingenious free-running reel for trolling. With this he could throw his minnow an alarming distance, and had on one occasion, by omitting to stop the revolutions of the reel at the proper moment, securely hooked a mild-eyed cow who was thoughtfully watching the working of the new invention from the opposite side of the stream; a feat which had cost him an excellent minnow and an hour's attendance, in his strictly cow-doctorial capacity, gratis. But after this he got the arrangement under better control, and had once even caught a small salmon with it. He was so pleased and excited that he unfortunately ran two points of a triple hook into

the thumb of the parson who had gaffed the fish for him; the barb of one hook standing well out through the poor parson's thumb-nail. When the parson, who was in great indignation and agony, ordered the cow-doctor to take his knife and cut it out, the cow-doctor gaspingly ejaculated that he had not the nerve to do it, and his suggestion of driving into Galsworthy for the doctor having been roughly negatived, retired behind a hedge while the parson unflinchingly carved the horrid thing out of his own flesh.

In the winter the thumb had quickly healed, but now its smart was awaking again and reawakening at the same time the ire of the parson, who, consequently, in the metaphorical phrase imported by the landlord from America, 'was always having his knife into the cow-doctor.'

At present a quite novel idea was agitating the cow-doctor's brain. He was very full of a scheme for drawing carriages and loads by means of kites. This, he was candid enough to admit, was only practicable when there was a certain power of wind; nor did he aspire in this manner to travel *against* the wind; but

with a 'soldier's wind,' or any wind abaft the beam at all, he contended that it was quite feasible, with kites of proper size and form and in sufficient number, to be driven from the duck-pond at the turn of the road in Brentleigh, right along the high-road to Barnstable Bridge.

As the first step towards practically perfecting this idea, he had constructed a kite of Brobdignagian dimensions. The first attempt to launch the monster had been a failure, for the cow-doctor could not manage to get it started. It would only make headlong drunken dives, and descending boomerang-wise, nearly cut its creator in two; thereby, as Mrs. Major remarked, demonstrating what she had always told him, 'that the air was not strong enough to support so large an object.'

The cow-doctor was disappointed, but still undefeated. He hit on the ingenious device of starting a smaller kite attached to the larger one as a leader to help it up and get it under weigh. And then, to Mrs. Major's discomfiture, the monster, after a lurch or two, sailed up majestically into the heavens.

The cow-doctor had taken the precaution of

attaching the rope near its end to a heavy stone roller, but now, feeling it tugging through his hands with great force, he bade young Master Major, who was an intensely interested spectator, hitch the slack of the rope that was over round one of the posts in the ' bullock-línhay ' (or cow-shed) to which the cows were chained at night, with the result that when the monster had reached the end of its tether, an ominous creaking was heard to grow into a crashing, and the monster walked away with the cow-doctor, the stone-roller, young Master Major, and a large portion of the cow-shed. This miscellany it took at a hard walk across a small grass field, and launching it against the hedge with a violent shock broke its tether, and with convulsive plunges made its way to the earth somewhere far up towards the moor, leaving the cow-doctor breathless and disconsolate at his bereavement, but triumphant at such incontestable evidence of the monster's power.

This trial the cow-doctor had made late in an afternoon of early spring. Dusk was coming on by the time he had sufficiently bemoaned his loss and gathered himself together to con-

sider his next move. By the time he had had his tea and started off to search for the truant kite, the sun had long set, but the light of a half moon, in a tolerably clear sky, gave a fair prospect of success. It was calculated that the kite would have reached the earth just about the spot known as Bromley Scratch — an euphemism for a name of somewhat coarse import.

Bromley Scratch was a small coombe, or basin rather, about a mile inland, and invisible from the Brown Bread Tray, very densely covered with small trees and impenetrable undergrowth. If the kite had indeed dived into this thicket it was lost for ever, but if it were only near to it and outside the tip of the basin, there was a chance of rescuing the pet monster before it suffered from the damp humors of the night.

The cow-doctor, apprehending that the parson and the landlord might be but captious critics of his trial, had prudently made it on an evening when both these worthies chanced to be absent. So Mrs. Major, having put her youthful family to bed, slept solitary in the parson's chair before the fire in the inner room of the Brown Bread Tray.

About ten she was roused from her nap by the sound of hurried footsteps without, followed by the bursting open of the door and the breathless entrance of the cow-doctor, exclaiming: ' Good Lord! Mrs. Major, wha? Brandy! Brandy! Am I safe, I mean to say, wha'? '

' Dear sakes! what be the matter? ' the landlady inquired.

' Good Lord! Mrs. Major, I mean to say; I've seen most terrible sights, eh, wha'? '

And the cow-doctor with many ejaculatory gaspings, and ' I mean to say wha'?s,' told a most thrilling tale of men of Titanic stature bringing forth from the earth's bowels barrels, casks, and what not, of a size far exceeding the Brown Bread Tray, and not much less than the entire village! At such an appalling sight many a stout-hearted man's native wit might have failed him, but not so with the cow-doctor. For a moment even he had stood spell-bound, then, with a presence of mind which he noted to his credit, he ran, and ceased not running till safe in the haven of the Brown Bread Tray and Mrs. Major's company.

The landlady listened to the young man's tale with less apparent terror or surprise than

dissatisfaction. She gave him his brandy, but was so discouraging as a conversationalist and listener that he soon betook himself to bed, while the landlady tranquilly resumed her interrupted nap.

An hour or so later her light sleep was broken by the stealthy lifting of the latch of the house-door. Turning her head she saw her husband.

‘ You ’ve been watched ! ’ was all the greeting she gave him.

‘ Watched, eh? Who by? ’ he inquired quietly, but anxiously.

‘ Cow-doctor; but he ’th such a silly fool, he thinks ’t is ghostesses or goblins,’ and she repeated with tolerable accuracy the cow-doctor’s account.

‘ He don’t know much himself, then,’ the man observed thoughtfully, when she had finished. ‘ But he ’ll tell it to others as will,’ he added. ‘ I reckon I ’d better be off and see the parson right away.’

So Mrs. Major was again left alone, and this time she elected to have her sleep in bed.

When the parson, whom the landlord found still in his sitting-room, had heard what the

latter had to say, he did not reply until he had softly whistled over to himself a verse and a half of an old Devonshire ditty. Then he answered quickly:

‘ ’T is easy enough. We ’ll make him think he ’s had “the jumps.” ’

This suggestion, after it had been a little more fully expanded, met with Mr. Major’s enthusiastic approval, and, after half an hour’s further confabulation, he returned to the wife of his bosom greatly comforted.

When the cow-doctor descended to the bar-parlor the next morning, he was surprised to find it tenanted by the parson, by Joey Dart, and by the master and mistress of the establishment. A further surprise was in store for him.

‘ Good-morning, eh, wha’? Mrs. Major,’ he said cheerily.

‘ Morning, sir,’ Mrs. Major answered, dropping him a courtesy with quite unwonted politeness.

‘ Did ye please for want anything, sir? ’

‘ Eh, wha’? I mean to say. Laughing at me, Mrs. Major, eh, wha’? Good-morning, parson, eh? ’

‘ Parson Passmore ’s my name. Did ye please to want anything of me? ’T is n’t very often as

we get a stranger down this here way. Come to see the stag-hunting?'

'Good Lord! Eh, wha'? what's the matter, eh? I mean to say, Mr. Major.'

'Beg pardon, sir,' said the landlord, touching his cap. 'Can I serve you with anything, sir?'

'Good Lord! Eh, wha'? I mean to say, wha'? *You* know me?' he said, turning eagerly to Joey Dart and desperately plucking at the sleeve of his jersey.

'Don't mind as ever I seed ye before, sir,' replied Captain Dart stolidly.

A little more of this excellent fooling brought the poor cow-doctor's wits, never of the clearest, into such a hopeless muddle that he might have been made, with equal ease, to believe himself a fat woman, a living skeleton, or a learned pig. His proper identity was perhaps the only thing of which it would have been difficult to convince him at the moment.

When he was at length reduced to perfectly inarticulate groaning, the landlord bent over him with a sympathetic whisper of ' 'Tis "jumps" you've got,' and led the poor young man, unresisting, to his room. There he persuaded

him to go to bed, and having administered to him a 'soothing potion,' in the form of a subtle mixture of spirits known only to himself, locked the door behind him, and left the wretched cow-doctor to his meditations.

CHAPTER VI

VENN'S FOLLY

IN the six months' period of reflection it was not possible but that Mrs. Elton's meditations should have gone through many devious tracks; wherein acceptance, throughout, was the goal to which the labyrinth always seemed to tend. There came no warning of danger, save the remonstrances of her sister, applied with the tender hand of one suspicious of her own motives; only these half-hearted remonstrances, and — the experience of all the centuries of history, in which there is no one recorded instance of man or woman consenting, on this matter, to avail themselves of any experience other than their own.

Mrs. Elton had indeed, before this, made an essay, not unhappily, of married life; and she accepted Heaton's proposal with every hope of finding the same prosaic contentment in her

new venture. For in a way she did love him, with the love of admiration and sisterly affection and pity for his forlorn life, though the depths of her nature were as yet unstirred, and quite unknown to her. Her own present life, moreover, she felt to be a narrow, purposeless one, and it seemed to her almost a duty to come into and fill up for this man, as far as in her lay, his ruined, broken one.

Of her final acceptance Heaton's action, in renting and setting in order the Folly, will have been taken as sufficient evidence. The staff of house-decorators was succeeded by a small staff of domestics, and the day following Mr. and Mrs. Heaton took possession of Venn's Folly, man and wife in the eye of the law.

'No, I am not surprised, George, dear,' Nelly said in answer to his remark on her undemonstrative recognition of each little arrangement they had planned for their cottage. 'I am not surprised, for I knew you would show good taste and would make it just what I should like it to be. I am content, and that means a very great deal; and I am very grateful to you besides for your thoughtfulness of me and my likings, dear.'

He had rather expected little cries of delight, but was pleased with the faith in him which this quiet acceptance implied.

‘It was purely selfish, Nelly. They are my likings just as much.’

‘Oh, what a heavenly view it is!’ Nelly exclaimed, throwing herself on the circular sofa in the little turret-shaped recess.

For the sun was low towards setting, and making a pathway of golden radiance across the sea, down which a fishing-boat with red-tanned sail was gliding; and to the southward the high cliffs beyond Galsworthy were wooded down to the very sea, and bright with the fresh green of spring, and just within the foreland the white cottages of Galsworthy went streaking down the cliff.

The first two days Nelly hardly left the Folly at all. She busied herself at home, making the little house, and in particular the drawing-room, so pretty that the parson who came to call had to rub his eyes and shake himself before he could believe that he was in the Folly and not in dreamland. The white jasmine and roses, *sofrano*, and *devoniensis*, which Heaton had planted, were watered and watched with

the most unnecessary attention. Nelly had fitted up a small back-shelf with her stock of pet poets and prose authors, and Heaton would read to her in the evenings, or she would sing and play to him.

‘Nelly, you *shall* come and see Galsworthy to-day,’ he said to her on the third day, when their home was at length more or less finally arranged.

Now Galsworthy merits a word of description, for it grew to be such a factor for happiness in Nelly’s life as it could never have become had it not won her enthusiastic appreciation on the æsthetic side. The high-road from Brentleigh and Venn’s Folly, as far as the turning down to Galsworthy, is a mile of straight, uphill weariness, shut in by high banks on either side from sight of sea or moor. At the turning there is a sudden break in the seaward bank; after which the road and the banks continue, wearily as ever.

From the gap though, where the turning is, you look almost perpendicularly down on a mass of green tree-foliage, on a white village set in it, and on a blue sea that seems to rise up to you as the eye wanders out from the

land. When you bring your eyes back from the horizon you begin to pick out details: the jetty, and the boats alongside, and little objects on it that are men; and you see a street running down dividing the cottages, and little patches of garden which lose themselves in the woods.

Then you begin to go down the zig-zag road between woodland and bracken-fern and heather, and across a hurried streamlet here and there, at times losing sight of the village altogether and then suddenly coming upon it again not quite so far below you, looking each time a little different and showing you a new feature of itself. When you get between the houses the road does not zig-zag any more, but goes straight down to the quay. The cottages are on short terraces levelled out of the cliff, with at most three, and sometimes only one cottage on a terrace. Many of them have a humble balcony and a veranda reaching out on the street.

And so you go down to the quay, on the wall of which blue-jerseyed idlers are leaning — from a little urchin lying with his middle on the wall, and his legs dangling far from the ground, to Captain Dart, who has to double

himself over to rest his elbows on it — to which habit Nelly at once ascribed the stoop in his great shoulders.

Nelly had of course fallen in love with him, at first sight, and the shamefaced respect paid to her, as to a being of a superior order, by this rough, magnificent piece of humanity, was a very curious sight. Heaton, as the weeks passed by, often went short cruises on the captain's boat, and his proffered half-crown was always thankfully accepted, but when Nelly, one very fine day, accompanied her husband, and her thanks were being tendered at the same time as Heaton's accustomed fee, Joey Dart replied very respectfully, with cap in hand, but most decidedly:

‘ Madam, I think 't is a great honor, you to come aboard my boat. Thank ye, sir, if you 'ld excuse me I 'ld rather not take the money ’ — and this, though he had not spontaneously addressed a single remark to his lady passenger during the sail, nor responded otherwise than monosyllabically to her efforts to draw him into conversation.

It took Nelly, with the tact of her sympathetic nature, but a very short time to make herself

known and liked among the unsuspecting fisher-folk of Galsworthy. She went to see all the sick people, and the old people in the little almshouse, and sang to them in a way which, by some proleptic power of memory let us hope, they said 'reminded them of heaven.' Most often, just at this time, she visited the cottage of Mr. Perry, the new coast-guard, the 'conscientious' man, as his mate had described him at the Brown Bread Tray. A little girl, a daughter of Mr. Perry, was very, very ill, and would in all human probability have died but for the tenderness and devotion of one rough man who was not of kin to her at all. For Mrs. Perry, always an ailing and peevish woman, was quite weary and ill herself with constant nursing, and Mr. Perry's conscience and duty often bade him tuck his glass under his arm and trudge along to Brent Foreland while his heart was left at home with his little girl.

'George,' said Nelly, one day as she came in, 'that little girl Perry is better. You know we almost gave her up yesterday; but last night it seems she passed the crisis. I *am* so glad. But, oh! George, whoever do you

think sat up with her last night, and has been so good and kind all through? '

' Who, Nelly? '

' Why, Parson Passmore. '

' What, old Jack? '

' Yes, old Jack. He is a dear. I 'ld like to give him a kiss for being so good. It 's' the same everywhere I go, George. Everybody says what a dear, kind soul he is: all the women and children and all. I 'ld like to give him a kiss, that 's what I should. '

' Poor old chap! How you would frighten him, ' laughed Heaton.

When the days were ' pretty ones for the moor, ' that is, bright, with small clouds hurrying across a clear, windy sky, Heaton and Nelly would go for rides miles and miles over the moor, galloping with the keen breeze in their faces, now and again pulling up for the view, and watching the dark shadows of the clouds chase each other like great things at play along the sides and over the crests of the hills.

Then, some days Heaton and the parson would start off trout-fishing, and Nelly, driving out in their little pony-carriage, would bring

luncheon for them, of which they all partook picnic fashion, including Perro and Kit and the parson's rough terrier.

And if 'Happy the people whose annals are dull' be a true saying in an individual application, then Mr. and Mrs. Heaton should have been happy people indeed. And happy, of a truth, they were — for the time being, at least — happy to an extent that was an insult to those formulas of the world's experience they were outraging and defying. The letters which Mrs. Whitstable at Monte Carlo received from Nelly not only asserted broadly that she was at perfect peace with herself, — to which, as an unsupported statement, the sister would have given no credence whatever, — but they were full of subtle incidental corroborations which she accepted with 'Humphs!' expressive of mingled satisfaction and surprise.

The Whitstables were staying abroad beyond their usual time; and, indeed, from the tone of Mr. Whitstable's amusing and disjointed letters to Heaton it seemed very doubtful if he would be able to tear himself away from his beloved continent that summer at all. And this was a sore grief to Nelly, though she did her best to

conceal from her husband how much she missed her sister.

Now it came to pass, after a while, that the small domestic staff at the Folly became alive to a certain strangeness in the relations of their master and mistress regarded in the light of a newly married couple. ' 'T is, for all the world, like a brother and sister,' the Folly servants were wont to declare. Hence originated a small stream of petty discussion and speculation, which permeated Brentleigh society and found its main outlet—always, however, in the parson's absence—among the frequenters of the bar-parlor of the Brown Bread Tray. And as human nature is very prone to think hardly of all that is beyond its own experience and comprehension, a construction came to be put upon these relations between husband and wife, which was diametrically opposed both to the actual truth of the case and to any conclusion that a logical method could possibly have deduced from the observed facts.

And of all this, one result was that, the rumor of these speculations having, by some unknown channels, found its way to the parson's ears, he one day burst in upon the

company at the Brown Bread Tray with face more red and beard more bristling even than their wont, and, mastering by an evident effort his indignant excitement, preached a short sermon and wound up with a mighty lie.

‘Look here, then!’ his discourse began. ‘You seem to have come here then like a pack of gossiping old women, you do. Here’s Mrs. Heaton’s been going about tending all your sick children, and visiting every one of ye that’s ever in any trouble; and here’s Mr. Heaton, the nicest, freest spoken gentleman as ever you’ll wish to meet — and I do hear as you’re coming here and telling up the most cruel, wicked tales about them, I do. There now! You should be ashamed of yourselves, you should. Anyway I’m ashamed of ye. I married them myself, I tell ye!’ the parson shouted aloud in his wrath. ‘I married them myself. There then! Will that do for ye?’

Silence and downcast eyes were the response to the parson’s challenge. In silence the parson took his accustomed chair. It was a trying moment in the bar-parlor.

Gradually the men began to recover them-

selves sufficiently to make pretence that something in the drawing of their pipes required their attention, and to wonder who would speak next.

It was, as they felt was fitting, the little landlord.

‘How’s old Kit’s rheumatics, parson?’ he asked softly.

‘Very bad,’ the parson answered grimly. ‘Specially in the tail,’ he added, which elicited, as was the intention, a rather tremulous guffaw. ‘Can’t wag her tail while there’s such talk going on.’

This conclusion subdued the guffawing again.

Then the parson reasoned with his flock more temperately, and finally ended by skilfully bringing them to good terms again with themselves and with him.

‘Now then,’ he said, ‘that that there’s over let’s have a “button,” Mary; and, what do ye say, shall I sing ye a song?’

And, almost before the chorus of enthusiastic affirmatives was clear out of their mouths, he struck up the following Devonshire ditty, which we will call —

‘THE RATS.’

‘Now there’s many a tale as I’ve heard told,
A many a tale, both new and old,
But this here he’s a tale what’s new as new,
And, what’s more, he’s a tale what’s true as true.

(*Chorus*) Dumbledum deary, dumbledum day,
’T is true as true whatever I say.

‘Now as best I can tell ye, so tell ye I will :
’T was one day I was coming up Raleigh Hill.
They was pulling adown of a rick by the road,
And a fine young gent a-watching mun stood.
Dumbledum deary, etc.

‘And beside this here gent stood his pleasure dogue,
No manner of use but a great big rogue,
With his left ear cocked and his left eye ope’
And t’ other eye shut and t’ other ear lop.
Dumbledum deary, etc.

‘Now, as they kept pulling adown the straw
Th’ old dogue’s left ear cocked more and more,
Till out there nipped across the road
A rat — dear eyes, such a great big toad !
Dumbledum deary, etc.

‘Th’ old dogue he was on un’ so mortal quick
He snipped ’un up ’most ’fore he ’d left the rick.
He just gave one golp and he swalleed ’un, pat ;
And there ’s no more see’d of master rat.
Dumbledum deary, etc.

‘Th’ old dogue he had hardly done licking his lips,
’Fore out there ’s another great big one flips ;
And the dogue snip ’ee up so quick as it’s told,
And, whai ! there ’s another gone down the same hold.
Dumbledum deary, etc.

‘ And, for all they kept nipping out of the rick,
Dogue snipped ’em up just all so quick,
Till his old inside was so full of rats
As ever a barrel was packed wi’ sprats.
Dumbledum deary, etc.

‘ Now when he ’d just swalleed up eighty-two,
I ’d scorn for tell ye what was not true —
And whether he ’d swalleed mun up too quick,
How ’t was, I don’t know — something took ’ee sick.
Dumbledum deary, etc.

‘ And he drewed up the eighty-two rats once more,
And — you ’ld hardly believe though a parson swore,
But the rats came out ’live when th’ old dogue was
sick,
And they all rinned home again into the rick.
Dumbledum deary, dumbledum day,
’T is true as true whatever I say.’

And having brought his song to this happy conclusion, the parson finished his glass and left the house in the midst of loud applause. As he trudged up the road his face wore an expression but little in accord with the scene of his late success as a vocalist. Indeed, the scene to which he was going was a very different one. He made his way to a cottage half a mile or so from the parsonage, where the old groom who had served him for so many years was slowly dying of sheer old age.

It was five hours later, and nearly midnight,

when he left the cottage, and, coming home, found his faithful, stupid old woman still keeping a drowsy watch before the kitchen fire.

‘ Well, Betty,’ he said in the deaf woman’s ear. ‘ Old John ’s gonè at last. ’

‘ ’Ees; I knowed it,’ she answered. ‘ I see’d the signs in the fire. ’

The parson made an impatient exclamation.

‘ He asked after you too, Betty,’ he resumed. ‘ But the last words of all he said was, “ I wonder how old Charlie horse is,” he says. ’

‘ ’Ees, I believe that then. The old horse ’ll die too, I reckon, for go after ’un. ’

The parson’s impatience again manifested itself, and he turned his attention to his spoiled dinner. But ever after this there was a ghost for him in that much loved department of his establishment, the stables; and though he took on a new groom to look after the young horse and the bedding, he never, when he was at home, allowed other hands than his own to groom and give his oats to ‘ old Charlie horse; ’ who, in spite of Betty’s prediction, lived to carry his master in many a good run after the wild red deer.

A day or two later than this, Heaton strolled over to the parsonage, after breakfast. The master was not at home. If it had occurred to Heaton to look in at the Brown Bread Tray, he would have found him there discussing his morning 'rum and milk.' Heaton went into the sitting-room, notwithstanding, where he received a rheumatic demonstration of welcome from old Kit, and sat himself down to examine the parson's fly-book.

Heaton had, almost unconsciously, fallen into the habit of strolling over to the parson's in the morning. There had arisen just the veriest shadow of a constraint between him and Nelly; the reason whereof was this, — the far-sighted vultures of the baser society papers could not, of course, leave quite alone, even in his efforts to sever himself from Society, one who had once been conspicuous in it, as Heaton had been. Since his return from exile they had been commenting upon his movements, and, above all, upon his marriage, with all their wonted impertinence. And their triumphant announcement to the public of Venn's Folly as the address of his retirement from the world was immediately followed by a huge tidal

wave — a bore, in fact — of letters from former friends; of letters sympathetic, congratulatory, expostulatory; of letters written in every spirit that the devious heart of man could conceive.

And as Heaton sat musing, as needs were he must, on the scenes and the friendships which these letters brought to his mind — though, indeed, it was in no regretful mood — it was borne home to Nelly very strongly the host of the pleasant things, as they are accounted, of this life he must have relinquished for her sake. Nelly had never moved in the society of fashionable people who were her husband's friends, and perhaps she overrated the fascinations of that society accordingly. As she watched him musing, she could not help a terrible suspicion growing upon her that he was regretful of it all; that, even if this were not so yet, it still were doubtful whether such barren affection as they had covenanted for would always prove an adequate compensation.

And in her very reflections Nelly found a new, startling element — was this, then, after all, a barren affection? She had never thought of

it so before. Hitherto it had ever seemed the most desirable of all.

‘For not to admire or desire, if a man could learn it,
Were more than to walk all day, like the Sultan of old,
in a garden of spice ;’

and they had seemed to have learned it so well: so that life’s problem in that aspect of it seemed to have been solved for them. And was this too to be but Dead Sea fruit?

Nelly strove, and with a tolerable success, in the elasticity of her bright nature, to put the ugly thought behind her; but nevertheless it was with ever so slight a consciousness of the possibility of something false, even to one another, in their position, that she met her husband after the first visitation of these imaginings; and with a feeling too that he himself was dimly sensible of her consciousness.

Heaton had only turned over a page or two of the fly-book when a sharp shower began pattering on the window. In the midst of it the parson hurried in, shaking the wet off himself viciously. He did not notice Heaton, but he did notice that the aneroid barometer was rising. Now this aneroid had been given

to him by Heaton in the hope of curing him of a contemptuous scepticism of the value of the instrument, which usually found expression in the assertion that 'it had no more influence on the weather than Mrs. Major's cats.'

The parson eyed it disdainfully, and tapped it unnecessarily hard. It persisted in its upward movement.

'Dasey! you vacant-faced, lying old humbug,' said its master, taking it down from the wall. 'Have a look at the weather for yourself, then, can't ye?'

He took it to the window and turned its face to the storm. Then he tapped it again; but it still showed no signs of repentance.

'Dasey! then; there you go,' the parson shouted, losing all patience with such an incorrigible. 'Go out there and find out whether 't is raining or no for yourself.' And, with that, he flung the window open and threw out the glass as far as he could into the rain.

He turned round with a satisfied grunt, and, catching a sight of Heaton for the first time, burst into a laugh in which amusement and shame were comically blended. After undergoing a severe five minutes of chaff and

reproach for such treatment of a friend's gift, he suddenly pulled Heaton up by saying in a grave voice:

‘Look here, boy; I’ve got a word to say to ye.’

‘All right. Drive on.’

‘’T is not a very pleasant word neither. ’T is a word I should n’t know how to say to ye if I knew ye ever so little less.’

‘Well, go on, Jack, old man, whatever it is,’ said Heaton, with some anxiety to hear what could call for such preface as this.

Then the parson forthwith told him in the straightforward way a man of the parson’s character would be sure to tell it, both what *they* said — the *on dit* of the Brown Bread Tray — and what he had himself said to silence them.

And then, in a queer conscience-stricken way, he made apology for the lie to the very man in whose service he had told it. For indeed it was a lie: the parson had had no hand in Heaton’s marriage, neither had he had any exact foreknowledge when the ceremony was to be.

After they had pointed out to each other several times, as people in like situations

always do, how absurd, how preposterous, how monstrous, how altogether inconceivable were the stories in circulation at the Brown Bread Tray, the parson, with a rough common-sense which overlooked the want of logic, began to question Heaton closely in order to elicit the facts on which this inconceivable conception had been based.

‘For,’ he pointed out, ‘there must be some *thing* as has set all this here talk moving; though of course there’s no proper *reason* for it, so to say. Is it that people don’t come and stay with ye, d’ ye think?’

And thus, driven into a corner, and in great straits for advice and the assistance of a strong, man’s mind, Heaton — with just the same feeling as Nelly had experienced of the difficulty of justifying their position in the eyes of others, however easy it was to do so in their own — told the parson, who listened with open-eyed amazement, of the experiment they were thus making of Platonic affection.

The parson’s amazement, indeed, was so profound that even the uneasy laugh that it drew from Heaton failed to rouse him out of it.

‘ I — I never heard anything like it,’ he gasped out. ‘ There ’s nothing like it in the Bible! There ’s nothing like it in Herodotus!’ — these were the parson’s standard works of reference.

Heaton’s silence appeared to admit the truth of this.

‘ I — of course I ought to give ye advice,’ the parson went on. ‘ Lord knows you want advice bad enough. But what advice am I to give ye? You ’re married to this here woman, now; and there ’s no help for it, it can’t be undone —— ’

Heaton jumped to his feet in a fury.

‘ What the mischief are you talking about, Jack? I don’t want your confounded advice. Do you think I want to get rid of the woman I have married? ’

Heaton was standing on a puma’s skin which he had himself given to the parson. The beast had attacked him, when wounded and when his rifle was discharged, but Heaton had killed it with his knife in close contest. It flashed across the parson’s mind that when the wounded puma made its spring the look in Heaton’s eyes must have been just what it was

at this moment. A thought arose too of the possibility, in case of his answering Heaton's last question unsatisfactorily, of his sharing the puma's fate. It was in no spirit of fear, though, but in very real sorrow for the words he had spoken, in what almost amounted to the stupor of his astonishment, that he answered:

'Oh, Georgie, Georgie, my dear old boy, I do beg pardon, pardon! I didn't know what 't was I said.'

'Jack,' exclaimed Heaton impulsively, his wrath vanishing in an instant; 'I'm ashamed of myself. Of course I know you didn't mean anything. It's just my confounded temper.'

And Heaton reseated himself, while the parson led the conversation into a safer line of country.

But though all recurrence to this little interview was strictly avoided on both sides, it yet was a frequent topic in the meditations of both.

'And so this,' Heaton could not help soliloquizing, 'was how his position looked to others; and not merely to "others," spoken generally, but even to one of such wide tolerance of men's follies, when they did not run counter to his own, and so charitably disposed towards him-

self, as this, his parson friend. It had not occurred to the parson for a moment to consider the merits or demerits of his position,' Heaton remembered. 'His first and only thought had been to deplore the impossibility of effecting a rescue. And all that these others, did they but know it, would think of his own position, they must needs think of his wife's position too. There could be but this difference, that whereas he had been the sinning and contriving party, she had been sinned against, reluctantly consenting, grievously wronged.'

Henceforth — though at present he would not admit but that life was quite happy for him, and though he believed that Nelly's life was happy too — he went about with a conscience ill at ease, which brought a little additional weight of gloom to the cloud that was lowering over the bright hopefulness of the Folly.

As for the parson, his inward censures were severe upon the *unnaturalness* of his friend's position. He was a man, as Heaton had truly reflected, of great tolerance for small vices; but this appeared to him an offence against the fundamental laws of God and man. He

was an intensely 'natural' man himself, with a great belief in the instincts implanted by Nature in man. The spirit of the question:

‘ Can that offend great Nature’s God
Which Nature’s self inspires? ’

tended to become a dangerously large element in his moral creed.

But in spite of all this he was helpless to aid the friend who was outraging the great maxims of his faith. He resigned himself, perforce, to sitting with folded hands while he awaited with interest and anxiety the *dénouement* of the drama.

Upon the surface the course of domestic life at the Folly had hitherto been running evenly enough, undisturbed by any of these ghostly visitations which had been found too severe a strain for the endurance of former tenants. After a few days of heavy rain in the latter part of May an indistinct sound of rushing water had been heard, but that fishy-flavored stone-mason from Galsworthy, who had been summoned for repairs in the roof, necessitated by the rains, examined the basement and the cellar also, and pronounced that

there was in this no cause for alarm, and that, in his opinion, it proceeded from some innocuous subterranean stream.

But one night, shortly after the stone-mason's visit, Nelly found herself on a sudden wide-awake. It was not like an ordinary lazy awakening, but like a swift change from deep sleep to intense vigilance.

'What was it?' she asked herself, expectation for the moment mastering every other emotion. 'She had heard no sound, but something on her bed had moved!'

With a sort of desperate courage, rising out of her terror of the darkness and silence, she swept out her hand over the coverlet — till she clutched a heap of something; which responded by a tiny cry: a cry inarticulate but human-like. Then her arm was grasped by what felt like tiny human fingers.

Nelly in a paroxysm of fright snatched her hand away and buried it beneath the clothes.

'George, George, George!' she cried with all the strength of her terror. And then she held her breath and listened.

She heard her husband stirring in the room just across the passage. Oh, what a time he

seemed! though he did but wait to light his candle and throw on a dressing-gown before knocking and entering hastily at Nelly's door.

'What's the matter, Nelly? Are you ill, dear?'

'Oh, George, what is it? what is it?' Nelly cried, still in a terror-stricken voice.

And then Heaton, holding up the candle over the bed, saw not indeed 'nothing,' as in the ghost stories of school-boy days, but such a very little thing — a little human child.

Yes, yes, it was — a real human child, and nothing ghostly about it whatever; for Heaton touched it, and at length Nelly even touched it too. And yet it did not appear quite like a common child either, for though of the more timid female sex, it showed no sign of fear at all, whether at the novelty of its surroundings, at the sudden candle-light borne in upon the darkness, or at the awe-struck look on the two strange faces which that light revealed. The little girl indeed had far the best of the situation. She looked up laughingly and fearlessly out of her black eyes into their mutely questioning faces. Then, seeing no response to her smile in them, with an impatient gesture

she buried her dark little face in the clothes for a moment, and then raising it again, stretched out her hand to Nelly with a little pleading cry of 'Mama.'

'You darling — you darling!' exclaimed Nelly, in her impulsive way, all the warm affection of her nature kindling in an instant.

And she took the child and put it into bed beside her, and hugged it and kissed it; and the child put its little warm arms around her neck and laughed happily, and in that moment they seemed to Heaton to have mutely sworn an everlasting compact.

'But where can she have come from, George?'

That indeed was the question: where *could* she have come from? She did not look like the child of common people, this waif with her dark, fearless little eyes and jet black hair and eyebrows. She was clothed in night-dress and little dressing-gown, and wrapped in a shawl, all of fine material. Her feet were warmly clad in worsted socks and hand-worked pair of little worsted slippers; and beside the bed, most wonderful perhaps of all, was found a bundle containing a complete small wardrobe.

And how could she and they have got there?

The doors of the Folly, both front and back, were found closed and locked, and every window securely bolted. Humanly speaking, it seemed an impossibility that any one could have found a means of entrance or exit during the night.

After an hour fruitlessly spent in searching the Folly from turret-top to basement and in closely questioning the servants, whose characters indeed were almost beyond question, it was determined to postpone further efforts to solve the mystery till the morning. Questions addressed to the child herself were answered volubly, but quite unintelligibly, to any one not possessing the key to the unknown tongue, probably infantine Devonshire, in which she spoke.

So Nelly and the child at length were left alone, and Nelly indulged herself with happy fancies and a few tears over her new-found treasure.

‘My darling, God has sent you to me,’ she whispered, as she held the little one to her heart. ‘God has sent you to me to help me, because He knows I am not quite, quite happy.’

And the child slept contentedly in Nelly's arms till the morning.

At breakfast, as may be imagined, great was the speculation on this most surprising thing that had come to pass — great, but quite inadequate to a solution. Equally inadequate was the flood of childish gibberish which the little girl gleefully poured forth in answer to their questions.

So, breakfast over, Heaton went to take counsel of Parson Passmore, *fidus Achates*. Now the parson's usual breakfast hour, at this season of the year, was 6.30 A.M. So Heaton was surprised to hear from his deaf old servant that on this particular morning he had not yet, that is at 10.30 A.M., come downstairs. Heaton went up and entered his bedroom with a resounding knock and a reproachful 'Lazy old beggar!'

At first the only thing that showed signs of life and welcome was old Kit. She emerged from under the bed, wagging the end joints of her tail stiffly, and stretching out one rheumatic limb after another to see which she would go lame on to-day.

Then a deep groan of protest against the

necessity of awaking came from the heap on the bed. The heap rolled over with a 'Hullo, old chap!' and the parson was sitting on the side of his bed trying to rub his eyes open.

'You're very late, Jack, this morning.'

'Yes, up late last night. Was — what was I doing? Dasey, if I bain't so sleepy I can't remember, hardly.' But at the same moment the brows knitted and the little black eyes twinkled vigilantly. 'Yes, I know. Out fishing with Joey Dart.'

'Well, now listen, you old sleepy-head! We've had the most tremendous excitement at the Folly last night.'

'Have ye, sure enough? All right, then; tell on about it while I dress myself;' and therewith the parson made a sort of flop, like a seal, into his tub.

The parson's toilet and Heaton's story, interrupted as it was by appropriate exclamations of surprise and incredulity, came to simultaneous conclusions. When they reached the downstairs room the parson had changed his mental attitude with regard to the mystery. He had at first appeared to be seriously trying to comprehend it. Failing that, he now pro-

fessed altogether to disbelieve its existence, and expressed an opinion that ' 't is a joke in very bad taste, to try to take in your old tutor.' He declined to believe the story before seeing the child, and with that object in view devoured a large portion of a round of beef, three apples, and a quart or so of cider, in about five minutes, and then set off with Heaton, back to the Folly.

And how the parson's scepticism was triumphantly refuted; how the child laughed at him most confidingly (being a sweet little thing, and at happy charity with all the world) and thereby appeared to take his heart by storm; and how all conceivable means of discovering who or whence the child was were tried, and for the present found wanting — all these things it needs not to chronicle in detail.

The parson stayed to lunch at the Folly, and afterwards showed Nelly and her husband a new and most delightful way into Galsworthy. Avoiding the dull highroad they kept lower down among the woods below the crest of the cliffs. Their path at first was a bridle-path, but soon became indistinguishable from the rabbit-runs that branched off out of it, except to the parson, who guided them

unerringly. It was a scrambly, brambly path, but a very pretty one, whence, here and there, through the green trees, you caught glimpses of the blue sea far below. Nelly's tweed skirt, too, suited the brambles well, but above she wore a blue jersey — knitted for her by Mrs. Dart to show her appreciation of the praise bestowed by Nelly on a similar one that Captain Dart wore, and which also his wife had knitted — and the thorns caught and tore at the worsted in a way that made Nelly exhaust her vocabulary of feminine bad language. But at length they emerged on to one of the garden plots and through that into Galsworthy main street.

Then they strolled down to the quay, where the usual little knot of blue-jerseyed idlers touched their caps, in the courteous west-country fashion, to the well-known trio. Nelly's adoption of their uniform had set her even higher than ever in the estimation of the knights of the blue jersey.

'Captain Dart, will you take us out for a sail?' Nelly asked the handsome giant.

But before he could answer, Heaton had interposed: 'No, no, Nelly; we must not ask

him to-day. It would not be fair. Captain Dart was out very late last night fishing. I say you were late last night,' he repeated, turning to Joey Dart as he spoke. 'You were out fishing, weren't you? My wife did not know that.'

'Yes, sir, us was out late, sure enough; but us was not fishing, and if ——'

'Yes, us *was* fishing,' the parson interrupted roughly, frowning the big fisherman to silence. 'Joey Dart,' he hastened to explain to Nelly, 'does n't consider as it ought to be called "fishing" unless he catches some "fish." But us was *trying*, Joey, eh?'

'Joey fishes mostly with a dry trawl night times,' remarked an old, crabbed-faced man who had overheard. Whereat a grin went round the quay, which Heaton and Nelly joined in out of sympathy, for they did not catch the meaning.

The meaning was that many a time of a night, or a misty day, had Joey Dart put in to the jetty uttering imprecations on Fortune for sending no fish into his net, and many a time had the quay idlers remarked that on these occasions there was no appearance whatever

about his trawl of having recently been in the water: wherefore it was the general conclusion that other business than fishing — concerning which Captain Dart had his own reasons for reticence — had on these occasions formed part of his nocturnal programme.

For one wild moment a scarce-formed idea suggested itself to Heaton of some dim, far-fetched connection between the unconfessed enterprise of the parson and Joey Dart, and the seemingly miraculous appearance at the Folly of the little child. It was but for an instant; the next moment the utter folly of the notion appealed to him, and he dismissed it, with a laugh at his own expense.

And then a friendly discussion began between Nelly and Joey Dart about their going for a sail. But Nelly, being now very determined that she would not go, and Captain Dart being very much afraid of transgressing the bounds of respect, Nelly and Heaton and the parson were soon strolling home again, and the fisherman was left in much the shape of a croquet hoop with his elbows resting on the quay wall.

The little girl, as one attempt after another

to learn who she was or how she came, resulted in utter failure, became a permanent member of the household at the Folly. In her companionship Nelly found a small measure of consolation for something which she had begun to feel to be wanting in her life. For the little rift in husband's and wife's mutual happiness did not seem to be closing up; but rather to be widening, just in proportion to the growing anxiety on the part of each to close it. Nelly again and again, as the weeks went by, pressed to an aching heart, and, in the silence of the night, confided all her sorrows to the little creature whom she almost believed God had in some supernatural way sent to be her comfort.

To an aching heart! Yes, for she had found it.

'Pray God, my dear, you may never find your heart and feel it,' her sister had said to her, so long ago, as it seemed, and yet, really, hardly a short year ago.

She *had* found it, and *did* feel it. But not in the way her sister had feared for her; for it was no other than her very own husband that had shown her what the human heart can suffer.

In those long summer days at the Folly she had learnt to love him, and to long for his love, till his kind, brotherly affection drove her almost to madness, and in the humiliation of her unrequited passion froze her almost to a stone towards him. She set a guard over her words, over her very looks. She did not dare to meet his face without setting a rigid look in her eyes to hide the love she knew them to be filled with.

And Heaton — what could he think — his consciousness of their false relation to each other making him almost morbidly sensitive to her moods — but that Nelly's affection for him was tiring? He indeed was beset by a double grief: his heart yearned for the affection he felt to be slipping from him, and his conscience smote him for the fetters he had laid upon Nelly, binding her to one who could give so little as he could do to satisfy the requirements of a heart. But for the memory of the mutual devotion betwixt him and his only sister, who had died — but for the sure conviction that with her he could have lived in peaceful content at least, and she with him, all their days — he would never have dared to

ask Nelly to cast in her lot with his on such conditions. But if with a sister he could have lived thus, why not with another woman?

The 'why not' is Nature's secret.

The child, even, tended to put them a little farther asunder. In her, Nelly found an interest and a companionship apart from her husband: they were not so exclusively dependent upon each other as before.

'You see I have a companion now if you go away at any time,' Nelly had once said, either in bitterness of heart, or merely thoughtlessly; and this remark had taken an exaggerated significance in Heaton's eyes. He had conned it over and over and found in it meanings that, very surely, Nelly had never intended.

Thus, it came to pass that while Heaton's affection for the wife he had wedded on such strange terms was ever growing, as he witnessed her innumerable kindnesses to others and her thoughtfulness for himself, yet in that understanding and sympathy which had once been so perfect between them they were continually drifting farther apart. A something had come between them, clouding over the peaceful happiness which had seemed to be dawning on their

lives through that former summer at Lifport, and in that first month of their life at the Folly — a something which made the parson find his friend growing restless, and over the subtle traces of which the sapient Mrs. Whitstable shook her head as she read her sister's would-be cheerful letters.

CHAPTER VII

BRENT FORELAND

WHEN the poor cow-doctor had recovered from the effects of the Circean potion administered by the landlord, he was allowed to come forth from his bed-room a prey to humiliation, to an aching head, and to new moral views on the temperance question.

‘Of course,’ he reflected, as he slowly and tremblingly descended the stair, — ‘of course all the bar-parlor would know he had been suffering from “the jumps.”’ It was far too good a joke in the eyes of those to whom he had revealed his wretched state for them to refrain from making capital out of it in the form of a prime story for the others.

Yet it was not so much the fact of having been the victim of this indisposition that the cow-doctor felt as a disgrace (that he rather regarded with Christian resignation in the light

of a misfortune), but it was the horrible uncertainty as to how he might have demeaned himself while under its influence that made his hand hesitate upon the door-handle of the bar-parlor. At which opportune moment the landlord came upon him, and beckoning him within the swing-door poured in a balm of comfort both to his doubting heart and tortured brain. For he gave him the 'best cock-tail for the head on either side the herring-pond,' as he phrased it, and spoke to him words that gave him courage:

' "Honor among thieves," I have heard folks say,' said he; 'the parson and Joey Dart have promised me that never they'll let on about it; and me and the Missus, I think, you *may* trust. So as for "the jumps," never you say a word to mortal soul, and no mortal soul shall ever know you've had them.'

The cow-doctor was no less relieved than surprised at this delicate consideration on the part of Mr. Major and the others. He was now able to take his place among his fellows with all his former confidence and cheerfulness, and was tolerably successful in restraining his tongue from ejaculating too freely about the

Titans he had seen with casks on their shoulders issuing from the earth. In his newly-found wisdom anent the virtue of temperance he conceived a warm admiration of Mr. Perry; for here was a man who not only could drop in upon the Brown Bread Tray and see a friend, without ordering a glass of liquor, albeit there was a jingle of money in his pockets as he moved, but who was even known at times to have refused a glass offered him at a friend's expense. This, in the cow-doctor's unregenerate days, before he had been visited by this chastisement at the hands of Providence (or of Mr. Major), had appeared a grave failing in Mr. Perry's character. But now the cow-doctor's eyes were opened to admiration and envy of such remarkable fortitude. He consulted Mr. Perry's opinion about the weather and other matters of like importance. He made him his confidant, and told him of the visitation which his intemperance had brought upon him, and of his visions while in that sad state.

Mr. Perry listened to the story with grave thoughtfulness. He was not altogether satisfied with the cow-doctor's own diagnosis of his condition.

‘ Did ye take a bottle out with ye when you went kite-hunting? ’ he asked.

‘ Eh! No, I mean to say. Upon my word, no. ’

‘ Well, you was n’t drunk when you started; ’cause I seed ye start; and you could n’t have got drunk on the road, ’cause you had n’t got nothing for drink; so I don’t see as you could have been drunk at all. So I don’t see as you could have had “horrors.” ’

‘ Eh! I — I deserved them, I mean to say, wha’? ’ answered the cow-doctor with dismal inconsequence.

Now this afforded the conscientious Mr. Perry food for reflection and conjecture. And since the parson had been a very good friend to his family, and since he looked up to the parson with much the same reverence as that with which he was himself regarded by the cow-doctor, he determined to take the parson into his counsels. So one day Mr. Perry accompanied the parson out of what Nelly called the ‘ Assembled Bar-parliament, ’ where Squire Venn’s legal difficulties were being discussed with that edifying mixture of compassion and approbation with which we see the chastening

hand of adversity laid upon our friends, and asked the favor of a few words with him in private. The parson assenting, they walked slowly on towards Galsworthy, while Mr. Perry repeated the cow-doctor's story, and stated the conclusions he had himself deduced therefrom.

He pointed out that the young man, so far from having 'horrors' about him that night, had been not even in an ordinary and normal state of intoxication, and gave it as his opinion that the vast shapes reported on by him were nothing more nor less than men,—men engaged in doing at night what they dared not do in the light of day: men engaged in an illicit trade: in a word, smugglers!

At which conclusion the parson laughed long and loud and deep.

'Do ye mean to say as you think as ever there's been a smuggler in Devonshire these last twenty years? Do ye mean to say as you think 't is necessary as a chap should be drunk at the moment to get the "horrors"? Do ye mean to say as you believe such an old fireside tale as this here?'

But neither the parson's arguments nor his

ridicule availed to shake Mr. Perry's opinions. His own view of the case had taken such hold upon him that he had been at the pains of making an exploring expedition to Bromley Scratch; but the hopeless density of the thicket had defeated him. And as he held constantly to his belief, and repeated the grounds of it again and again, the parson's views by degrees seemed to be coming round to his own; a graceful concession which led Mr. Perry into further confidences than at first he had intended. For he told the parson that he viewed with suspicion Captain Dart's mode of fishing 'with a dry trawl;' further, that when Captain Dart was out at nights he intended to keep a sharp look-out, whether from Brent Foreland or from Galsworthy Quay; which intention and all which suspicions he had not imparted to his mate, Mr. Muxworthy, because he 'don't care, and 's too fond of his liquor.'

Finally, Mr. Perry was gratified to find that his proposed course of action met with the parson's warmest approval and promise of zealous co-operation; and they did not wish each other good-night until with mutual satis-

faction each had undertaken to summon the other on the appearance of any indication of illicit doings.

It was only a few nights later that Mr. Perry, having drawn the Brown Bread Tray blank, knocked at the door of the parson's cottage. He was answered by the parson himself, who cordially welcomed Mr. Perry, and bade him enter. Coming hastily into the sitting-room, he at once found himself an object of suspicion to old Kit, who was perhaps unused to conscientious men, but he was so excited by the news he had to tell that he paid no regard to the old dog sniffing at his heels, and scarcely waited for the parson to close the door before beginning:

' 'T is right as I told ye; there's summat going on! So happened as I was a-leaning over the Quay Wall, and I was n't a-thinking about this here at all, when so happened as there come a ship's light a-moving in either just this here side of Brent Foreland or just the t' other. Well, dasey, if I'd a-thought on it all the day before, but says I to myself, I says, "Joey Dart's out," I says, "I do believe." Make inquiries — out, sure enough! So I be

just going up along the cliff on to Brent Foreland. Will ye come, parson?'

'Right; I'm with ye,' answered the parson with remarkable readiness, seizing up his hat and stick, and the two sallied forth.

It was a silent, cloudless night, but rather dark, for there was no moon, and a thin haze hung between earth and heaven, through which the stars peeped like mere tiny points of lights.

'Better take along Mr. Major,' said the parson carelessly, as they reached the Brown Bread Tray, 'three's better 'an two.'

'Do ye think us can trust he?' suggested the other doubtfully.

'Trust 'un! No. What need to trust 'un? I'll just ask "will he come walk up to Brent Foreland along with us?" He'll come, right enough.'

And, without giving his companion time to demur, the parson strode into the Brown Bread Tray. His invitation was accepted with as much alacrity as if a walk out to Brent Foreland on a dark night was one of the landlord's most accustomed pleasures. The three stepped out at a good speed, the coastguard from time to time calling a halt and scanning the seaward

darkness, but without result. No sign of the mysterious light had been seen when they reached Brent Foreland.

Arrived there, the coastguard lay upon his chest, and resting his telescope on the edge of the cliff tried northward, westward, southward—all in vain. All was silence and dim indistinctness. The faint 'swash' of the placid waves only made the silence deeper.

Suddenly, the wild, prolonged cry of a curlew came up from the sea, rending the still air. At the same moment the coastguard felt a heavy weight fall on his back and shoulders with force that crushed the breath from him. He was in a man's powerful embrace, gasping, too breathless to struggle or to utter more than a groan. In a minute, while the one man was still on his back, his hands and feet were pinioned, a gag forced on his mouth and a bandage over his eyes by the dexterous hands of another. Then the weight was raised from his back. Painfully he drew his breath again. He heard the parson's voice at a short distance raised in anger, and heard sounds as of a scuffle. He heard two shouts of 'Help! help!' from the landlord. Then the voices and the sounds of

struggle receded farther into the distance. Finally, he was left alone with the silent darkness, speechless, blind, and helpless as a log.

The curlew's note shrilled out again; this time from somewhere on the moor behind him, and then — all was silent again —

For three-quarters of an hour; each quarter of which Mr. Perry's imagination multiplied for him into a whole!

Then his ear, close down upon the turf, caught the vibration of steps coming towards him. He made frantic but futile efforts to shout. But it was unnecessary. Steps came nearer and nearer, and halted. The coastguard knew that a man was standing over looking at him.

'Why did he not take off his gag, untie his bands? The fool! Or,' horrible thought! 'were these his assailants returned?'

The man gave a low, shrill whistle; and then other steps came up. A lot of men he knew were looking at him; yet still they did not cut his bonds. It was intensely irritating to Mr. Perry, and not a little terrifying, this silence when human beings were about him.

At length a voice spoke, and in no very

reassuring manner. It was a voice strange to Mr. Perry, and it said: 'Swear now — you swear now as you'll never come out spying this way night times no more. Will ye swear?'

There was a pause. The coastguard might have been willing and anxious to swear by all his gods, but gagged as he was he could not have made a sound. This fact seemed suddenly to strike one of the men about him, for a different voice from the first one began: 'Why, then, he can't ——' when it was interrupted by imperative 'Hushes' and 'Quiets.'

Then steps withdrew from the pinioned man, and in a minute returned again. The voice which had first spoken said, 'That'll do, then. I'll unloose 'un so as he'll be able talk mumbly.'

Mr. Perry's heart beat high. This was not much on the way to freedom, but it was at least something. He determined to keep quiet and, by answering nothing, to induce his persecutors to ungag him so completely that on their departure, if they again left him, he should be able to shout aloud for help.

The gag was loosened ever so little.

'There now; will ye swear then?'

No answer.

‘ Will ye swear, you fiend of the law? You can speak well enough if you ’ve mind to. Will ye swear, or shall us heave ye over Brent Foreland? ’

Alas, poor Mr. Perry! He shivered at his desperate situation. But he was a proud, obstinate man, and the more they threatened him the tighter he set his teeth on the gag and kept down the words.

They dragged him like a log up the sward to the edge of the cliff, where was a place that suited their purpose. He felt another rope tied round him. Then two men lifted him.

‘ Now then; will ye swear? ’

No answer.

‘ When I say “three” you go over. One, two—— will ye swear then? ’

And at length the poor fellow spoke, and shouted, overcome not by terror but by mad anger at his abject helplessness.

‘ No, I won’t swear; you sons of devils! You coward devils!—— ’

‘ Three! ’ and the body was shot over the cliff edge and vanished from sight.

Now Brent Foreland is a sheer precipice six hundred feet high.

It is a wild, desolate place. No sea-birds nor hawks nor jackdaws nest about it as they do in other parts of the cliffs of the coast and of the Eye Island opposite, some eighteen miles out to sea. And when the sea is swelling at all in the channel a race of broken water tears down upon Brent Foreland from the northern point of Eye — from that Island where disturbances of all kinds, human and atmospheric, were most frequent, if report spoke true at all. No king or queen of England had troubled about Eye. It was one man's estate, who held it without payment of income and all the other manifold privileges, which occur to mind without naming, of the British householder. The owner of Eye was absolute as Alexander Selkirk, and his subjects were not far more numerous. For the most part, the population was fluctuating and various, for in stress of weather vessels of all nationalities putting into its tolerable natural harbor discharged their seamen to riot over the Island and come in frequent collision with each other and the sons of the soil. But by dint of violence and menaces and kindly persuasion, applied alternately and with a perfect knowledge of the nature of the

men he had to deal with, the Czar of Eye had his own way without any serious trouble from the Nihilists.

Over Brent Foreland then, a precipice six hundred feet high, the body of Mr. Perry, the coastguard, had been launched by cruel hands.

But it did not descend the six hundred feet; scarcely indeed a hundredth part of that distance: for this reason, that the end of the rope round Mr. Perry's body had been fastened to a crow-bar dug into the ground above. He swung with cruel force against the face of the cliff, but he still retained his senses.

‘Will ye swear now?’

But the bitterness of death was past. His foes might do as they listed. He had no emotions of any kind, and was silent.

‘Us ’ll leave ’un till come morning for think over it, and then us ’ll cut away and let ’un fall,’ said the voice that had pronounced his fate throughout, and then Mr. Perry was left alone.

Gradually the numbness of his despair left him and he became all too cruelly alive to his awful situation. He could hear the sea far below: he was suspended by a rope attached

to some stay, he knew not how fragile or how fastened in the treacherous crumbly earth, and at the mercy of one stroke of the knife of foes who had shown themselves none too merciful: his bruised, aching, tortured body was poised between heaven and sea. For hours that seemed to him interminable he hung so.

At length he again heard a step draw near; but what might it bring? Merciful release or merciful death?

It was another voice this time that spoke the same cruel question:

‘Well, now then, will ye swear?’

But he could only groan in answer; and whether this were taken as refusal, or whether his enemy were wearied out, Mr. Perry with a quick rush of breath felt the rope loosed — felt that he fell — and scarce felt he was falling before he touched ground.

Scarce a foot could he have fallen! All these hours he had been hanging scarce a foot above solid ground. He bethought himself of a small ledge which in one place close to the summit broke the sheerness of the cliff. Doubtless that was his present resting-place. One movement might launch him over the edge;

yet his one thought was thankfulness for the momentary comparative respite from bodily pain.

He felt something touch the fingers of his pinioned hand.

'A knife. "'T is open,' said the voice above.

He clutched it in his half-dead fingers; drew it from the loop of the cord by which it had been let down; with the fingers of the right hand cut the bonds from the left wrist; tore the bandage from his eyes, the gag from his mouth; cut the ropes around his ankles, and knew perhaps the happiest moment of his life.

It was then gray dawn, but the sun was above the horizon before Mr. Perry sufficiently recovered the use of his stiffened limbs to attempt the climb of eight feet or so to the cliff head. His assailants were not in sight, nor were any of the implements used in suspending him to be seen, but Mr. Perry had been careful to bring up with him, for future reference, that part of the rope which had been around his body. It was a rope of a rather peculiar strand, he was glad to see. He looked at it with an unpleasant tenderness.

'When I find your mate,' he said, stowing

away the coil affectionately under his coat, —
'when I find your mate I shall be near finding
a sheath for my knife near by.'

And walking stiffly and laboriously, but
with dogged determination, he reached Gals-
worthy, about breakfast time, more dead than
alive.

Now though by the light of more recent
revelations it has been possible to tell succinctly
this misadventure of Mr. Perry's, its details did
not present themselves with any clearness to
his own mind, even when some twenty-four
hours of sleep and rest had restored him his
normal faculties. And if his own ideas of what
had befallen him were thus confused, when
rumor came to busy itself therewith it made
confusion worse confounded, so that the addition
of various exaggerations to sufficiently sen-
sational facts made up a story which awoke
all the excitement to which a West-country
population is liable. For these people are not
of a kind to be lightly moved. Probably there
is still in their natures all the 'devil' which
animated Drake's buccaneers of the Spanish
Main, but it is a slumbering demon, slumbering
not with any intent of feline treachery, but

beneath a placidity of manner in harmony with the soft influences of nature and climate.

‘Barbarous,’ ‘brutal,’ and ‘outrage’ were terms in most frequent use among those who discussed this matter. Especially were they found on the lips of the landlord of the Brown Bread Tray, whose words were listened to with the deference due to one who had taken an active interest in the proceedings. He and the parson, it appeared, had defeated and put to the rout their assailants and pursued at first their figures, indistinctly seen in the darkness, and then the sound of their retreating footsteps far up towards the moor; till at length even the footsteps were heard no longer and the pursuers were fain in their weariness to presume that Mr. Perry had fared no worse than they and to betake themselves with a light conscience to their beds.

Thus were Galsworthy and district supplied, for the proverbial nine days, with food for fruitless conjecture; after which Mr. Perry’s adventure sank beneath the horizon of every one’s mental outlook, except perhaps his own. He said little about it, but he was noticed to have fallen into a habit of whetting his knife

upon the palm of his hand when the subject was referred to in a manner which made the beholder feel ill at ease.

‘ You see, ’t is all so well to be ready, in case —— ’ he observed to the parson.

The latter worthy man only replied ‘ Yes ’ in a more thoughtful way than was usual with him.

‘ Ah, ’t was a main cruel thing for do; ’t was a sin and cruelty, parson, and ’t was a main coward thing, too. ’

‘ Yes then, I believe ’t was a coward thing to do, sure enough, ’ returned the other, as if in grave consideration of the moral aspects of the outrage.

‘ I ’ve a-kept this here bit of rope; do ye see? And whenever so happens as I fall in with the mate of ’un I ’ve a-swared as I shall be near finding a sheath for my knife, near by. ’

‘ Let ’s see the rope, then, ’ said the parson, stepping forward with a curious smile on his face.

Mr. Perry exhibited the end of it, but did not unwind the coil from round his waist.

‘ Yes, you ’re bound to know it if you meet with it again, ’ said the parson, referring to the

peculiar nature of the rope. 'But look here, now,' he went on with a sudden and rather unpleasant change of manner. 'You must n't get swearing things like that there, you know. You'll only get yourself heaved over the cliff head without any bit of rope to swear by if you don't mind what you're saying.'

'Oh, I know when 't is safe speaking and where 't is best for hold still, well enough.'

'Ay, so you think; but maybe you might be mistaken,' the parson said, smiling again softly. 'Anyway,' he continued, 'you don't suppose 't is likely the fellows as heaved you over would keep a bit of the rope, or another rope like that there, just to hang themselves by?'

'Well, there! Maybe yes, maybe no; I be going to keep my bit of rope, though,' said Mr. Perry, with a stoutness of purpose that defied argument.

CHAPTER VIII

REPENTANCE

THESE were the golden days of September when, though the corn was still uncut, the parson and Heaton could go out upon the moor and shoot partridges and black game and occasional snipe. Old Kit was a miracle, she was infallible. She was a true-bred retriever, but the parson had broken her to 'range' and 'point' with the steadiness of the stanchest pointer; nor was she ever known to move, though a 'runner' might be scudding past her very nose, till the signal, 'Seek dead,' was given.

And how a man of the parson's temperament could have broken a dog at all, much more how he could have trained a retriever to combine with her own the peculiar excellences of a pointer or setter, was to Heaton a standing source of wonder. It was no doubt a strongly

moving cause of the parson's intense affection for the old dog that she was living testimony to his power of subduing his rough unruly temper.

One day after a morning of hard walking and fair sport, as such sport goes, the parson called a halt about 1 P.M. for sandwiches and whisky diluted with the water of a little moor stream which came noisily rattling down a gully fringed with ferns and alders.

'This runs into Bromley Scratch, I suppose, doesn't it?' asked Heaton, lazily trying to follow with his eye the course of the stream and gully.

'Yes, I reckon,' answered the parson, in a careless voice, though his eyes sought Heaton's face with a keen suspicious glance for an instant.

'And where does it come out? There's no stream below Bromley Scratch that I know of.'

'Soaks through to Australia, likely,' the other suggested.

'I *have* thought I heard a sound of running water under the Folly,' Heaton said meditatively.

'Have ye?' said the parson in an uninterested

tone. 'What's the bag, Tommy?' he shouted to the boy who was carrying the game.

'Three brace partridges; one and a half blackgame, one snipe, one rabbit,' Tommy answered hoarsely through a mouthful of bread and cheese.

'Well, take they down to Mr. Yeo's farm then, and come up again so quick as you'm able. If you should meet with a covey by the way, you mind you mark mun down.'

After watching Tommy's retreating figure for a minute or two in silence, Heaton exclaimed:

'By the by, Jack, I had a letter from James Whitstable this morning. It's rather strange what he says, part of it, shows how narrow the world is.' Heaton took the letter from his pocket as he spoke. 'He says,' he went on, '“I have met one, Etheredge, whom you knew in old days. He was a Queen's Messenger then, but nobody would intrust a message to him now, except his liege lord and master, Beelzebub. At very low ebb he is, poor fellow. I once was unlucky enough to detect him in some shady play at Vienna, and I let him down softly; as a judgment on which ill-timed leniency I am inflicted with his friendship and

melancholy confidence. He is engaged at present in some venture in the contraband trade. He was good enough to offer me a share, which I declined. Curiously enough he mentioned Eye Island as the sort of half-way house for the cargoes. Brings the smugglers rather near your part of the world. He asked after you in a very friendly spirit, for him. Seemed very much interested to hear about your mysterious *enfant trouvé*. Wanted to know the color of its hair and so forth — more than I was able to tell him?" Queer thing, is n't it, Jack?' Heaton concluded, folding up the letter.

'I knowed it,' Passmore said absently.

'You knew it! what?'

'I — I knowed, I mean,' he said, pulling himself up, "that that there precious Captain Etheredge was on the war-path downwards. Georgie, my boy, you're not well,' he went on, changing the subject and for once speaking out the blunt sympathy which was oftener expressed by a kindly hand laid on the shoulder or a softened look in his keen dark eyes. 'My poor boy, I'm sorry for ye,' he ended lamely.

‘ Not well! I ’m quite well, Jack.’

‘ No, you ’re not, my boy. You ’re restless, I can see. You ’re quite changed, and you ’re looking bad. You ’re not well, Georgie.’

‘ All right, I ’m not then,’ said Heaton, in a tone of irritation at his friend’s persistence, turning away to take up his gun. In a moment he laid it down again. ‘ Oh, Jack, old man, I beg your pardon,’ he said in apology for the tone rather than the words. ‘ I did n’t mean to say that. You are quite right, I am not well; I am more like a weak hysterical woman, I think, than a man.’

‘ Tell me about it, Georgie. It ’ll do ye good to speak.’

‘ Do you think so? Perhaps it will,’ he answered humbly. ‘ Well, there ’s not much to tell,’ he went on, speaking quickly, with an assumed carelessness, both voice and manner unnatural. ‘ You know how I married my wife; you know the conditions we married on; well, since we ’ve been married I have learnt to love her, that ’s all!’

‘ Well, Georgie, — well, then I congratulate ye —— ’ the parson began in a half-hearted way, feebly striving to grasp some point of

difficulty in the case which he felt he was missing.

Heaton interrupted him :

‘ Congratulate me ! ’ he echoed bitterly. ‘ Have you forgotten our conditions, then ? ’ Don’t you know we agreed —— ’

‘ Dasey then ! can’t ye change the conditions ? Can’t ye tell her ? ’ the parson broke in, his patience sorely tried by his friend’s moods.

‘ Jack, you talk like a fool,’ Heaton retorted irritably again. ‘ I’ll tell you now something that’ll show you how impossible that is ; ’ and then Heaton told him how Nelly had taken fright that day at Lifport at the very shadow of a suspicion that he thought her affection for him other than that of a sister.

‘ No, Jack,’ he concluded sadly but decidedly. ‘ If you could but know how she took it when she thought I spoke of love to her at Lifport, where she was free, you would see how utterly impossible it is for me to open my lips to her now that she is bound and unable to go away from me in her humiliation. Oh, Jack, if you could but know how I have repented of that make-belief of a marriage — I don’t know what to call it — I led her into, I think you would

pity me, Jack. I could never have done it if it had not been for those two years I spent in places where social relations are all anyhow.'

'She might have changed to *you* too, Georgie,' the parson ventured to suggest.

'Yes, Jack, old man, so she has changed. She does not love me even as much as she did then.'

'Oh, Georgie!'

'Ah, it's true though, my old friend. I know it only too well, believe me. Now, then, let's be moving again. I'm glad I've told you, though, Jack. Somehow your knowing it seems to lighten it.'

'Poor boy, I am sorry for ye. I wish I could lighten it for ye a bit. Somehow you've had a cruel life of it.'

And at the first covey that rose the parson aimed a right and left, with barrels he had forgotten to load!

Nelly too, no less than her husband, was being affected by the tension on her nerves of that guard she was ever keeping over herself, and by the constraint that had grown — grown, it seemed, out of nothing — between them. She felt herself ill and nervous, absolutely shrinking

from her husband's society, yet hating to be alone and deriving all the comfort she had from the vague sympathy of the child to whom she would tell over her sorrows in the silent night, but who only knew dimly that 'mama,' as she called her, 'was unhappy.' Then, sometimes, feverishly raising herself from her grief, Nelly would call on her bright fancy and tell the child wondrous fairy tales, in which a central figure was a beautiful white swan, with a band of gold around its throat, whereby it had power to become invisible at will; and between the wings of the swan a little girl used to be carried round the world visiting the palaces of kings and magicians; and whenever the little girl put but one finger within the collar of gold on the swan's neck, behold! she too became invisible.

'Oh, mama!' the little girl would cry in the broad dialect which she had not yet unlearned, when the story, to which she listened with the intensity almost of terror in her expression, was finished, — 'oh, mama! will white swan ever come for me?'

And 'mama' would clasp the little wild-eyed child to her heart and cry with the

sickness of hope deferred: 'Oh, dearie, there are no white swans like that in the world now-a-days. Would that he might come; not to take you away from me, darling, but to take us both away together.'

With increasing distress Mrs. Whitstable read unhappiness more and more clearly between the lines of her sister's letters. She had looked forward to seeing Nelly and helping the unorthodox marriage venture to a happy result; or if, as she too much feared, that could not be, at least to give her sister her mite of comfort and sympathy. But even that had been denied her. Her husband would not quit the Continent, and she would not consent to leave her trying post as his mentor and comforter.

So, at length, after much self-communing, Mrs. Whitstable wrote a very pressing invitation to Nelly to pay them a visit; craftily insisting that she was in sore need of Nelly, whom she felt to be really in sore need of her, or at all events of some change from her present life. The invitation extended, of course, to Heaton, but Mrs. Whitstable knew well there was little chance of his accepting.

Nelly's heart leapt as she read the letter.

She had been indeed meditating, though not with any definite view of putting them in practice, all kinds of impossible escapes from the torments that were distracting her. And yet — and yet — in her heart of hearts she felt that she *could* not voluntarily exile herself from the presence of the man she loved, no matter how great the torture of that presence.

Should she then accept this invitation? She could cut short the visit when she wished (for she was not at all deceived by her sister's pretended 'need of her'). But still a visit to the Continent from a remote corner of Devonshire was inevitably a matter of some little time. And would George not think her unkind?

Any number of times daily she was a prey to contradictory impulses about it. For a day or two she carried the letter in her pocket, undecided and half dreading to show it to her husband. Then, as the necessity for answering it became more immediate, she plucked up courage to broach the subject to him. She merely said that she had had a letter from her sister, and gave it to him to read without comment. She watched his lips

close a little more tightly as he read it; that was all. When he reached the end, he kept his eyes steadily on the sheet for a minute, as if he were still reading, but Nelly knew he was thinking over it.

Then he looked over to her and said kindly: 'Yes, do go, dear; you'd like to go, wouldn't you?'

'But won't you go too?'

'No, no, dear, of course not. Of course I sha'n't go. I don't like those sort of places.'

'Then I won't go, either. I — I can't leave you here alone.'

Something in the tone touched Heaton. He was standing by the door; with a quick movement he came towards her with love in his heart, on his lips. Nelly, for a moment off her guard, put out both her hands towards him as he came. Then, remembering, and fearful that even in this little gesture she had revealed her secret, she froze up into herself again. She shook the hand which Heaton had contented himself with holding out to her when he found his advance thus unresponsively received, and said with a forced, nervous little laugh:

‘ Poor old brother! It would n’t do to leave you all alone, would it? ’

‘ Yes, certainly it would. Of course I should get on all right, though you know I should miss you, Nelly. Really, it is my wish you should go.’

‘ And it is my wish not to go, brother mine,’ she said lightly. ‘ You ’ll let me stay with you, won’t you? ’ she asked jestingly.

‘ Yes, I ’ll let you stay,’ he said, answering her jest mournfully enough, and left the room.

If only Heaton had opened the door again a minute later, he would have found Nelly in an agony of tears to which none but he could have brought relief; but that ‘ if only ’ is the heading of so many a chapter in our review of the past! Heaton did not, in fact, see Nelly for an hour or two, and by that time she was just his kindly, affectionate sister again. Neither of them referred to Mrs. Whitstable’s invitation, and that very same evening, to forestall any possible change of her fickle mind, Nelly wrote to decline it.

Many secrets were confided that night to the little waif.

‘ You were not invited, darling. Poor little one! I believe they forgot all about you,’ Nelly

said, 'but I should have had to take you all the same. I wonder when our white swan will come for us. Do you think he will ever come?'

'Es, q'ite sure he will,' the child said confidently.

'God bless you, dearie,' Nelly said, accepting the childish assurance as an omen. 'But I want him to bring me something, not to take you away,' she went on quite seriously. 'Do you want to go away?'

'Go 'way for little; den come back and bring 'oo summat.'

'Something, dearie, say,' corrected Nelly gently. "Good-night, little one.'

'Dood-night, mama.'

The next morning Nelly's spirits had risen again in reaction from her depression of the evening before. At breakfast she was bright and cheerful, more like her old self than she had felt for weeks. There was her letter to her sister not yet gone to the post, but she felt no inclination to open and alter it.

'What a heavenly morning, George!' she said. 'Will you take me for a long walk, right up on to the moor somewhere?'

'Oh, Nelly, I am so sorry, dear, I promised

Jack I'd go and shoot with him to-day; but we'll go to-morrow, shall we?'

'Oh, yes; it doesn't matter a bit; I'll go with the little one for a little walk.'

They always called the child 'the little one.' A name had been invented for her, but whether they had a feeling that it was a fictitious one, or for whatever reason, they never brought themselves to make use of it.

So, soon after they had seen Heaton start off with his gun, Nelly and the child set out on their walk. They went from the Folly by the path leading to the churchyard, and so on into the main street of Brentleigh and upwards towards the moor. Nelly, talking in low tones, was concluding some veracious story of the white swan's adventures, which had been left unfinished on a former occasion, when, just as they reached the gate into the churchyard, she stopped short.

'We won't go that way, dear,' she said, abruptly turning round.

'Why not, mama?' asked the child in open-eyed wonder.

'It — it makes me feel sad, the churchyard, where the dead people are, you know, dearie.'

The child was silent. Probably she was mentally remarking that mama had often gone that way before without seeming sad. Nelly, however, hurriedly resumed the story, and brought the wanderings of the white swan to what the child evidently regarded as a very uninteresting conclusion.

Yes, she had often been through the churchyard before, and the presence of the dead had not inspired her with the solemn thoughts that perhaps were appropriate to the place. But on this bright autumn morning it was the presence of the living among the dead that had robbed her walk of its pleasure, and the sun of its brightness, and sea and sky and moorland of their color.

For there, seated upon a grave, she had for a moment caught sight of a familiar figure, the figure of her husband. His face was buried in his hands as he sat, in the very attitude of despair, on the grave of his old love. Nelly knew that grave well, for she had often paused before it and asked herself what manner of woman this 'Agneta Etheredge,' whose mortal body lay there, could have been that she had taken all the capacity for love out of George

Heaton's nature. At the first a consideration of his feelings, and afterwards her own pride, had kept her from asking questions about this rival, whom she had latterly, in the change which had come over her, and which she sometimes told herself was making all her nature evil, begun almost to hate, though to her she was but a fiction and to her husband only a memory.

'How came it, then, that her husband was there in the churchyard? Had he deceived her? Had he never intended to shoot, but had he invented that pretext for not attending her on her walk?'

These thoughts flashed across her mind for a moment, and then she put them from her and hated herself for ever having held them.

'No, no, no, such deceit was not in him. Something had interfered with the shooting. The parson had had something else to do. But, still, it would not have been too late, even then, for him to have come back, had he wished it, for their walk.'

This point, however, was cleared up at dinner by Heaton's observing that they had not started until late, because the parson had gone over to

an outlying farm on his parish to visit a sick man and take him a delicacy in the shape of a dish of trout which he had risen about 5 A.M. to catch for him.

Nelly was absent and silent all through the evening, and went to her room early, pleading that she was tired.

‘Oh, my darling, my darling,’ she cried passionately to the little one. ‘If only he would give me one particle of the love he bore that other! And yet, no — a particle would not do. I want it all, all, all.’

And long after the little one had gone to sleep in her arms she lay awake with the vision haunting her of her husband sitting on the grave, sorrowing, as she thought, for his lost love. Each time that she woke from a short fitful slumber that vision was instantly with her; it was ever present.

She came down the next morning wearied in mind and body, but full of a new resolve.

‘George, dear,’ she said gently, ‘I have changed my mind. I think I should like to pay Emily a visit for a little.’

‘Very well, dear, do,’ he answered, in a tone which was kind, and yet had an unnatural ring

in it. 'I think it will do you good, dear,' he went on slowly and sadly. 'I am afraid you want a change.'

'Yes, I am afraid I do want a change,' she repeated, with a meaning in the words which her husband could not guess at. 'You won't mind, will you, dear?'

'Mind! No, I sha'n't mind,' Heaton said quickly.

He could not trust himself to speak kindly any more. He felt that if he relaxed ever so little from a hard manner his emotion would get beyond his control.

'Shall you take the child with you?' he asked.

'Oh, yes, if Emily'll have her. You wouldn't know what to do with her, would you?'

'No, perhaps not. How long do you suppose you'll be away?'

'Oh, I don't know — about — how long do you suppose?' She referred to him, because her own views were so absolutely unformed.

'I'm sure I can't tell. It'll depend entirely on yourself. I hope you'll enjoy it, and it'll do you good, Nelly.'

And he gathered up his letters and went out.

Nelly still sat at the breakfast-table with

dry-eyed, pale face. All through those few commonplace sentences her heart had been crying out to her, 'He does n't care a bit; he does n't care a bit;' louder and louder with each word her husband spoke. Heaton, too, was communing with himself. He had tried to act kindly by the woman he loved. He had no right to strive to keep her. It was his duty to acquiesce in her most natural desire for change and the society of her friends, and to hide from her that her going, and even more than that her desire to be gone, seemed to be taking the very pulse out of his life. He felt it almost as the beginning of the end; for if, at the Folly, Nelly grew wearied and longed for a wider range of interests, was it possible but that this visit must intensify her distaste for their secluded life? The present was, to him, full of distracting pain; his future would be one of forlorn hopelessness.

Neither Heaton nor Nelly spoke again of her departure, but, in the course of a day or two, Heaton became aware of a movement of trunks, and of a maid going to and fro with dresses that had not been worn for a long while, and of various other signs of flitting.

Then one day Nelly said: 'George, dear, I'm going to-morrow.'

'To-morrow, Nelly! So soon as that!—well, perhaps you are right, dear. You are not looking like yourself. I am afraid Emily will say I have not taken care of you. Shall I send Jackson with you, or will you get on all right with Palmer?'

'Jackson! I would n't have a man for the world,' said Nelly, with a forced laugh. 'They always lose all the luggage and their heads, together. No, seriously, George, Palmer and I can manage all right for ourselves, and the little one will be company.'

'Yes, the little one will be company for you,' Heaton echoed bitterly, and even jealously. 'She's a dear little soul, though,' he added, in quick repentance of the envious thought.

In the evening, the last evening before her departure, Nelly was singing, as Heaton fancied, more gloriously than ever before, uttering all her pent-up love and sorrow, when there came a loud hurried knocking at the front door. Jackson answered it, and voices were heard as in altercation, a high-pitched Devonian voice with Jackson's subdued and tutored one. Then

Jackson appeared at the door of the small drawing-room with just the merest suggestion of a smile upon his face.

‘A person wishing to see you, sir.’

Heaton went into the hall, where he found Betty, the parson’s old woman. Without waiting to be questioned, she grasped him familiarly by the sleeve and shrilled into his ear, as if he were as deaf as herself: ‘You must please to come over to once. Parson, he ’th main bad; I reckon as he ’ll die; and old Kit, her ’ll die, too — there!’

‘Good heavens, Nelly!’ he exclaimed, dashing into the drawing-room. ‘They say that Jack’s dying. I’m off to him.’ And he dashed back into the hall, seized a hat, and ran on to the parson’s little house, leaving Betty stumbling and grumbling along behind him.

He looked into the parson’s little sitting-room; there was no one there. A cartridge-bag had been thrown so carelessly upon the table that some of its contents had rolled out even on to the floor. As he took note of this he heard a heavy footstep pacing the room above. He went up the stair swiftly and quietly. The door of the parson’s room was

open, and through it he saw the parson — with face so drawn with anguish as he had never seen it before, but in physical health seemingly well enough; for it was he that was pacing the room to and fro with monotonous tread.

As Heaton came into the room and his old friend looked towards him, he saw that the dark eyes set in the rough red face were brimful of tears. The parson held out his hand in silence.

‘ Jack, old man, they told me you were ill; is anything the matter?’ Heaton asked anxiously.

The parson pointed to the bed, where, for the first time, Heaton saw old Kit lying perfectly motionless, but watching them with wistful eyes.

‘ The matter!’ said the parson in a choking voice. ‘ Anything the matter! I tell ye I hate myself more than the lowest creature that God ever made upon this earth; and I think worse of myself than of the lowest. There’s no beast but man would have done such a thing; there’s no man but myself would have done it.’

The parson threw himself on his knees by the bed, and laying his head upon the counterpane beside old Kit’s, cried out passionately:

‘ Oh, my sweetheart, my old, old sweetheart, however could I have done it? I ’ld give five good years of my life to have ye back, I would. Kit, Kit, can ye ever forgive me? Will ye forgive me before you die? ’

The old dog, as if she had understood the words, parted her jaws languidly, as if by an effort, and licked her master’s forehead.

‘ Oh, heavens! I can’t stay here,’ exclaimed the parson, starting up. ‘ I shall go mad. Not to be able to tell her how I feel! For her to die and never know it! If she would but hate me I could bear it.’

‘ Come downstairs, Jack, and tell me about it,’ suggested Heaton gently, much mystified by it all.

‘ Don’t ye know, then? ’ said the parson, with the surprise we always feel at any one’s ignorance of what has been much in our own thoughts. ‘ Why, I was shooting to-day; so I fired right and left into a covey. I seed one fall to the left and one to the right. Well, I says, “ Seek dead,” I says. Well, she starts away, full gallop, nose to ground, out to the right, far out, far from where I seed bird fall. I halloaed; no good. Halloaed again; she just looked back.

Again; and she turned her head away, and on. So — I can't hardly tell ye — I was mad — she had never done like that before — I put up my gun, fired! The moment as I'd done it, I'd have given my right hand to have back the shot. I throwed the gun away, went up to the old Kit — what do ye think? — there, under her foot, was the bird! Must have been a runner as I never seed drop to the first barrel. I carried her home.'

'Then *you*'re all right, Jack? Betty told me you were ill, dying.'

'Betty's a fool. I wish I *was*, almost,' the parson said apathetically.

'Then old Kit's wounded?'

The parson nodded.

'But she'll get better, won't she, Jack? It is n't bad, is it?'

He shook his head. 'No, never.'

'But, Jack, my dear old man, you should n't take on so about it. After all, you see, it is only a dog. Why, Jack, you could n't be more distressed if it had been a fellow-creature.'

'Fellow-creature!' the parson exclaimed, with a momentary return of the old fiery temper. 'Bain't old Kit a fit fellow-creature

for me? No, that she bain't, you're right. She's worth such a man as me a thousand times over. You're right. There's hardly a man on this earth I wouldn't sooner have shot than that old dog, though I should hang for it. There's only one older friend in the world than that old friend I've murdered, and that's yourself; and yourself couldn't be no truer friend than her. I tell ye I've murdered the truest friend I have on earth; and sure enough I'm no fit man for the God above to be a friend to. Oh, a curse upon my temper!'

'Jack, Jack, old man, *don't*; try to calm yourself. Let's come up and see the old dog again.'

So the two went up again to where she lay dying, and the parson could not keep himself from giving her now and again the gentlest caress, to which she responded by a moan full of pain, and a grateful look in her solemn eyes. It was indeed no extravagant saying of the parson's that he would give five years of his life to undo the consequences of that moment of angry passion. But all his grief availed nothing, for about midnight old Kit stretched herself out, and a shiver passed all over her,

and then her gentle, faithful heart was still forever.

Heaton went down into the sitting-room and waited for his old friend. When the parson came down he could talk quite calmly, though in a spirit of humility which touched Heaton greatly.

‘Georgie, Georgie,’ he said, ‘I’ve suffered more to-night than I ever believed any human being could suffer for the loss of a human friend; and I’ve learnt something, Georgie,’ he went on humbly, very unlike his usual self. ‘’T is meant for a lesson to me, I do believe. I never believed in they sort of “lessons” before, but I do believe in this here one. I’ve been a bad man, Georgie, a bad man; a worse man than you know of, and you know a good deal. And mostly I’ve been a bad man because I was so sure I was a good one. I thought as everything that I thought was right *was* right, and so I just pleased myself and thought as *that* was right. But this here has showed me as I am a bad man, — bad, bad, bad, worse than any of them as I’ve undertook to be parson to. I’ve been the worst where I did ought to have been the best.

‘ “For if gold ruste, what schal yren do?” as old Chaucer saith. Yes, Georgie, I ’ve been bad parson and bad man. I did think as I could be like the old Cyclops, “a law unto himself,” where I ought to have looked to better places for a law, and showed these untaught folk an example in keeping it. Old Kit, old Kit, you was a true friend to me in your lifetime, but now as you ’ve died for me you ’ve showed me a better lesson than any your life would have taught me, my old sweetheart!’

Now of all human weaknesses there is none of which men are so ready to repent as of repentance. But it was not so with Parson Passmore. Though of so sudden a growth, the change in him was thorough, lasting, and progressive. From this time forth, as he went among his parish folk, it began to be noticed that while the kindness which sprang from his good heart was as ready as before, the roughness of manner with which it had used to be tendered was becoming by degrees toned down. Moreover, though he did not by any means eschew the bar-parlor of the Brown Bread Tray, he did not take the lead and give en-

couragement to the drinking as heretofore. Fewer buttons of his long waistcoat were called into requisition. His exhortations from the pulpit became less purely practical; the inducements to good behavior which he held out were not so exclusively of the plum-pudding and blanket and Christmas-box class. In other ways, too, which will appear presently, his conduct grew to adapt itself better to the code of morals approved by the mature wisdom of the nineteenth century. His influence, which had ever been powerful, began to exert itself in a direction more conducive to the order and morality of his flock.

The foundations of this reformation were laid with much suffering and humiliation while the parson talked with Heaton in the small hours of the morning after old Kit's death. Heaton was particularly anxious not to oversleep himself on this the last morning that Nelly was to be with him — the last for he did not care to conjecture how long — so he and the parson prolonged their conversation until it was time for him to go home and get into his morning clothes.

Nelly's first words to him were:

‘ How is Parson Passmore, George? I sat up ages for you last night, but you never came.’

‘ Oh, Nelly, I ’m so sorry,’ he said contritely. ‘ I quite forgot you did n’t know. Jack is all right; perfectly well. He never had anything the matter with him; but old Kit is dead. She died last night, and, oh, Nelly, you don’t know how old Jack went on about it; he was quite beside himself. He said himself he was more grieved than he would have been about the death of any human being in the world.’

‘ Poor man, he must feel lonesome — his only companion! But, George, I don’t suppose he meant that about being more grieved than for a human being, did he?’

Nelly was a little shocked at the sentiment.

‘ Oh, yes, indeed he did mean it, Nelly. Oh, I should have told you he shot old Kit himself. Of course that made it worse for him; he would not have taken it like that if the old dog had died in an ordinary way.’

‘ Oh, of course, that makes it ever so much worse. Poor man!’ said Nelly, evidently attributing Kit’s death to an accident — a mistaken view which Heaton thought it better to let pass without correction.

‘ Are you packed up all right, Nelly? ’

‘ Very nearly; I ’ve just got a few things to do. ’

‘ I ’ll take the little one for a little walk till the carriage comes round, shall I? ’

‘ Yes, do, dear, ’ Nelly assented, feeling it a positive relief to be free of the presence of the man she loved, just these last few minutes.

Heaton and the child went out by the familiar churchyard path. He was thoughtful and did not speak.

‘ Who is buried here dat ’oo love? ’ the child asked, tightening her grasp of his hand to attract his attention.

‘ Who? ’ he echoed, too preoccupied to wonder how she knew enough to lead her to ask the question. ‘ Ah, some one — Agneta Etheredge. ’

‘ Agneta Etheredge? ’

‘ Why, how well you say it, little one, ’ he said, rousing himself and looking at her in surprise. ‘ Have you ever heard it before? ’

‘ Don’t know. Sink I have. ’

‘ Has mama ever talked to you of it? ’

‘ No, s’e has not; on’y s’e said dat ’oo was not kind; dat ’oo did not love her as ’oo did

some one out here, p'haps Agneta Etheredge. 'Oo not kind to mama; I hate 'oo. Mama c'ying last night 'cause 'oo not kind to mama,' and the hot-tempered little thing angrily threw his hand away from her.

Heaton, however, was in no mood to be trifled with. He held the little girl's shoulder, and, looking into her face in an intent way that would have frightened most children but only moved this one to wonder, asked her:

'Little one, are you quite sure that mama said that?'

' 'Es, q'ite sure.'

He stood still for a full minute, thinking. Then he turned and began to walk slowly back along the path they had come.

'I think we will go home again, little one.'

The next moment he heard the parson's voice shouting to him: 'Georgie, Georgie!'

He looked back and saw the parson with Mr. Major on the high-road.

'Georgie, here!' the former called again, as he turned round.

'I can't come now, Jack,' he answered; and went on his way with the little one to the Folly.

CHAPTER IX

EYE ISLAND

MR. MAJOR had presumed to set up his word against the parson's; a fact which, *judice* Mrs. Major, boded no good. Such opposition had probably been heretofore a thing unknown. The landlord, indeed, used at times to exhibit a certain jocose indifference to the parson's evanescent outbursts of wrath, but this in reality argued no independence of spirit, but simply an accurate knowledge of the man who was his master. But even a worm will turn; and the parson had come up to Mr. Major and asked him to do such an intolerable and unreasonable thing! The result of which was an altercation held somewhere within the precincts of the swing-door, from which Mrs. Major was banished, but of which she overheard the epilogue, spoken in most sullen tones by her husband:

‘ Well, of course I must go, because I ’m compelled to it, but I ’m blamed if I see why you can’t keep your cursed penitence to yourself and let other folks repent when they ’ve a mind to. Be a knifing job, this one, likely.’

‘ Knifing job! Wugs!’ said the other scornfully. ‘ Best way tell that to some one as ’ll believe it.’

Now, though the parson’s repentance was sincere and steadfast, the first result of it partook of the nature of melodrama. When, in company with Mr. Major, he had hailed Heaton in the churchyard, they had settled their altercation to the landlord’s dissatisfaction, and were on their way to Galsworthy.

Arrived there, they called upon Mr. Perry, whom they were fortunate in finding at home. After clearing the room of an inconvenient number of children, the parson entered upon what was evidently the real business of the visit:

‘ Well, Mr. Perry, do ye still keep that there bit of rope about ye, then? ’

‘ Yes, faith, that I do,’ said the coastguard, producing the end of the coil from under his pea-jacket.

‘ And have ye still got the same object in keeping ’un? ’

‘ ’Ees, that I have, sure enough. Sure as ever I finds a mate to this here, I ’ll be finding a sheath for my knife near by. ’

‘ Well, then, see here, then! This here looks like a mate to that there. ’

The parson, as he spoke, drew from the tail pocket of his dark frieze coat a piece of rope matching exactly Mr. Perry’s peculiar sample.

Mr. Perry looked at the rope, and then at the parson, and then at the rope again, in helpless bewilderment.

‘ Then you —— ? However did you come by this here? ’

‘ Why, then, I ’ll tell ye plain. ’T was me and Mr. Major as bound ye, and gagged ye, and heaved ye over the cliff — there! ’T is us as you ’ll have to make sheath for your knife. ’

As the parson spoke he drew a step forward, not as offering himself a willing victim, but in order to place himself between Mr. Perry and the landlord. He felt pretty sure the coast-guard would not attempt to put his long-cherished purpose into execution upon him, but

he was not quite so satisfied of Mr. Major's inviolability.

Mr. Perry, however, sat still and silent.

'So we have come to ask for pardon,' resumed the parson. 'We have come to say as we think 't was a cruel, coward act; to say all as men can say, to put right what 's gone so far wrong. Mr. Perry, will ye forgive us?'

Mr. Perry kept silence about half a minute longer, and then snapped out quickly: 'I be d——d if I believe a word of it.'

'Mr. Major, I appeal to you if it is n't strict true?' the parson said solemnly.

'Well—well—well,' the little landlord stammered out, and then paused. He would have given anything to have dared to lie, but with the parson's angry eye on him he was afraid to.

'Yes, yes, 't is true,' he at length brought out. ' 'T is true, just as he 's told.'

And then Mr. Perry afforded the interesting spectacle of a man struggling in the wreckage of all his previous conceptions of human nature as he feebly endeavored to realize that it was one and the same human being that had watched over and preserved the life of his little girl, and had suspended him like a spider, and

made him pass through all the bitterness of death, over Brent Foreland.

Now, it will readily be believed that Mr. Major, not having been through the parson's moral experience of the preceding night, and possessing, indeed, a nature quite incapable of any such experience, had been most unwilling to make the confession which, with the parson, was the outward sign and seal of his repentance. It was too, too bad, the landlord felt, that he should be forced to make confession because an unaccountable change had come over the moral views of another. In the course of the altercation at the Brown Bread Tray he had tried several shifts in the vain hope of inducing the parson to reconsider his purpose; whereof one was the following remark, thrown out in the tone of a menace: .

‘ If that ’s the turning you ’re giving your coat, you ’ll have to reckon it up with the Eye Islanders, parson — eh? ’

At which the other had laughed scornfully, and had implied in few but forcible words that the opinion of the Eye Islanders about his action was of no importance to him, and, indeed, in the absence of a little explanation

which shall be presently forthcoming, it is not very clear how it could have been otherwise.

The parson had called out to Heaton, as the latter was retracing his steps from the churchyard to the Folly, in order to acquaint him with the object of the visit he was about to make to Galsworthy, but Heaton had lost this piece of sensational intelligence by persistently going about the business of which his thoughts were full.

Nelly had told the little one that he was not kind to her; she had shed tears over his unkindness. She too, then, had not found their marriage scheme on this strange basis a happy one — that, indeed, he had long feared, but never had he guessed at her suffering as the little one's words now revealed to him. Yet he knew not wherein he had failed; nor with such feelings as his for Nelly could he believe it possible that he had been other than kind and tender and affectionate. But fail he had. The pretty Arcadian idyll had been tried and found wanting, and nothing was left him but to do his most manifest duty — to set free, so far as he was able to do so, from the ties that bound her to him, the woman without whom he felt his life would

be nothing worth. And yet!—What did this mean, which also he had gathered from the little one?—that part of his unkindness was in ‘not loving mama as he did some one out in the churchyard—perhaps Agneta Etheredge’! What could it mean? he asked himself, as he felt his heart beat quick with hope. But, alas! Nelly had seemed so different to him from all that this implied. They had not been drawing closer to each other all these days at the Folly, it seemed to him, but drifting farther asunder. He was in desperate case: human endurance could go no further. For better or worse he would know his fate, separation or love; and that quickly.

Nelly was in their drawing-room, making her last preparations, when Heaton came in with this purpose at his heart.

‘Nelly,’ he said, ‘will you listen to me a minute?—just a minute, seriously. Nelly, it seems we made a mistake,’ he began humbly and sorrowfully. ‘This life of ours is not happy. It has not been happy to me, quite, for some time past; and now I believe—I know—it is not happy to you. But it is no matter. You know we are not bound, morally

bound, to each other by any ties; you may go; you may leave me to-morrow; and perhaps it were better so,' he said hardly, heedless of a sound like a sob which Nelly would have given anything not to have uttered. 'But since it has come to this,' he went on, with a fierce bitterness in his voice — 'since on any terms it appears it is impossible for us to live together, I may tell you that I *love* you, love you with all my heart and soul and strength. Oh, it is better a thousand times that you should know this and leave me, than that we should live together like this. Have you an answer?'

No, there was no answer.

At length Heaton looked round. Nelly's face was hidden in her handkerchief and she was sobbing convulsively. Heaton's heart smote him.

'Nelly, what is the answer?' he asked in a softened voice.

'Come here. Yes. Don't you know? I love you.'

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The coachman who had come round to take Nelly and the little one to the station passed some remarks on the instability of gentlefolk's

minds as he drove back again to his stables; but his observations were by no means unique nor at all worthy of record.

It is surely some excuse for Heaton's inability to read that inscrutable heart of Nelly's that it could utter such a sentence as this, in reply to a question of his in the course of the same day:—

‘No, I think I love you in a way the more for loving that other so very steadfastly; but now I love you more still because I know you love me.’

And if only the parson could have heard their ample confession and repentance of their offences against his great ‘Nature's maxims,’ he surely would have given them plenary absolution.

‘I have been a prig morally, Nelly,’ Heaton declared, ‘and I tried to make a prig of you too; but you would not let me do that, and now you have at length rescued me from being one.’

As they were seated at dinner in the evening comparing their present content and happiness with the misery that would have been their portion if the little one had not all uncon-

sciously said those fateful words to Heaton in the churchyard, heavy footsteps came crunching up the gravel to the Folly porch. The visitor did not trouble himself to ring. He hastily and noisily opened the front door, and, striding across the little entrance hall, knocked at the door of the dining-room, and entered without waiting for an answer. It was the parson.

‘Georgie,’ he exclaimed. ‘I want ye, quick! Beg pardon, Mrs. Heaton. ’Tis case of life and death.’

‘Whatever is it, Jack, old man?’ Heaton said, rising and following him into the hall.

‘Where’s your little one?’

‘The little one! Upstairs, in bed — what do you mean?’ he said, gazing at him in vacant astonishment.

‘Why, bring her. Bring her, then, I tell ye. Her father’s dying. Bring her quick, I tell ye,’ he went on, seeing the other still standing in irresolute bewilderment. ‘I’ll tell ye about it as we go. Only fetch her quick — and, see, wrap her up warm and fetch yourself pair of shoes and socks extra. Do as I tell ye, quick! You’ll find out why soon enough.’

Heaton went about the parson’s orders as if

in a dream. In the meantime the parson had explained the facts to Nelly, so far as possible in the short time that elapsed before Heaton reappeared with the little one in his arms half asleep and wrapped in a shawl.

‘Come on!’ the parson said. ‘No. That there way,’ he added, pointing down the passage to the kitchen.

Heaton stopped, in helpless obedience, still inclining to the belief that he was dreaming, while the parson, opening the front door, called ‘Joey!’

Upon this, Captain Dart appeared, with a pickaxe over his shoulder, and now for the first time Heaton observed that the parson was shod and greaved in long fisherman’s boots.

The parson led the way, the blue-jerseyed, fair-bearded giant went next, and Heaton followed them without question, bearing the child in his arms, down a flight of stone steps to a cellar-like repository of firewood and lumber in the basement. The floor was of large, square paving-stones, but a great part of it was covered over by faggots and rubbish. A few sweeping kicks of Captain Dart’s sea-boots

cleared the central paving-stone. With a firm deft stroke he then inserted the point of the pickaxe into the mortar at one angle of the stone thus bared, and, leaning upon his pick, prized up the great square stone without the least exertion. The parson bent down, seized it, and laid it back clear of its former position, whereupon Heaton saw, without the least surprise, for he felt as if his faculty for wonder was exhausted, a flight of stone steps leading down to darkness, towards the sound of rippling water.

The parson gave a whistle like a curlew's cry, and an answering curlew's whistle came up from the earth. Then a light flashed through the darkness underneath.

'Better give the child to me or Joey; give 'un to me; and turn up your trousers, Georgie, up above your knees,' the parson advised, in a matter-of-fact, business-like way for which, as a nerve tonic, Heaton was grateful, for he was beginning to feel uncanny.

So the parson took the child and descended the steps, and after him went Joey Dart with the pickaxe, and then Heaton, who had all his work to mind his own footing. Twelve steps

downwards brought him with a splash into water above his ankles.

He stood still and looked about him. He was in a subterranean passage along the floor of which rippled a little stream. It was of such a height, except just where the steps were, that though he and the parson had to stoop a little, and Joey Dart a good deal, nevertheless, another man who had just joined them, and who carried a lantern whose light revealed him to be the skilful stonemason of Galsworthy — him of the fishy odor — this man, being not above middle height, could walk along at his ease. And by the lantern's light Heaton made out that the passage, cave, or whatever it should be called, extended back he could not tell how far in the opposite direction to that in which the parson was guiding them.

After a few minutes of what by reason of the boulders was to Heaton most uncomfortable walking, notwithstanding that the friendly stonemason gave him the aid of his lantern and his advice, the water deepened to the knees, a gentle swell and swash came up the cave, and just as Heaton, after an unusually desperate flounder, was becoming anxious about the

probable result of the next, he perceived with relief that the parson had come to a stop and was laying the child in a boat whose bows were just grounding upon a shelving edge of gravel.

They all got in. Joey Dart was in the stern wielding the tiller and boat-hook; the parson and the stonemason at the oars; Heaton with the child in his arms at the bows. Then the lantern was put out, and as his eyes became used to the darkness Heaton saw that they were just at the cave's mouth.

Joey Dart, working hard with the boat-hook, got the boat afloat and turned her bows to the entrance. The parson and the other rowed gently. Although the open sea looked smooth and friendly, Captain Dart kept the boat's head on a point of land on the port bow, and, with one hand on the tiller, held in the other the boat-hook, ready for use, while he looked intently into the dark water over the boat's side.

So they rowed in silence, and gently, bearing straight on to the point.

'Now hard!' exclaimed Captain Dart suddenly, as he dropped the tiller and made his way with huge clambering steps to the bows.

The oarsmen bent to it, and the boat shot on.

'Sit tight, Georgie,' the parson said.

Just as the boat's nose came level with the point the current took them and swirled them inward; but Captain Dart was ready with the boat-hook. There was a shock, as it met the rock, which made the boat tremble and the boat-hook bend, but seemed to affect the big fisherman very little. For a moment the boat stood almost still, then her bows were shoved out into the current again, and when it once more swept her back she was past the point and in safety.

The men drew a breath of relief, for though there was no actual danger, provided the boat-hook were skilfully and strongly wielded, it was a work of difficulty and as such well over. Joey Dart clambered back to the tiller and they rowed out to sea, where, two or three hundred yards from shore, his fishing-smack was at anchor. As they got farther from the land, and Heaton was able to see its configuration, he recognized easily enough the little bay they had had such trouble to get out of. He had often speculated, in an unenthusiastic, lazy way, about the beach at that particular place,

simply because it happened to be un-get-at-able. The cave, which turned at a sharp angle at its entrance, showed no evidence of its existence to a boat outside. The cliffs above were not lofty, but quite precipitous; it was impossible, without the aid of a rope, to climb up or down them. The bases of the low headlands that ran out crescent-wise to the westward, and so formed the bay, were never uncovered at the lowest tides; it was impossible to clamber round them. Finally, Heaton had one day swum round from the other side of the north headland on an exploring expedition, but jagged rocks in the shallow water had compelled him to turn back a sadder but no wiser man, leaving small portions of human epidermis festooning them. In point of fact, a geological convulsion had so upheaved the strata that the rocks all ran like a field in ridge and furrow, *across* which Heaton had painfully endeavored to swim his way, and *down* one of the furrows of which the parson and Captain Dart had discovered a safe channel into the cave.

But all this the parson told Heaton in many a conversation afterwards. For the present, as

soon as they were safe on board the smack, which straightway stood out to sea, and Heaton had got himself into dry nether garments, and the child had been warmly stowed away into one of the two tiny berths with which the cabin was fitted, then the parson most considerately thought fit to enlighten Heaton as to the object of the abduction or kidnapping, in which he had been so far a blind instrument. Heaton was quite dazed. He did not ask any questions, not because he had none to ask, but because he wanted to ask so many that he did not know where to begin.

‘ Well, Georgie, my boy,’ said the parson, patting his shoulder admiringly. ‘ I must say as you ’ve behaved main well. Lor! lor! what a many questions some folks would have asked by this time, sure enough! You deserve as I should tell ye all about it. Georgie, my poor boy, I shall have to rake ye up some old griefs; but there! ’t is time you knowed it, and you ’ll bear it better now than you would have done one time.

‘ ’T was about a year’s time after you left England on your travels, you mind, some three years gone now —— ’

‘ Stop a bit, Jack, with your long yarn. Tell me this, first: where are we going to? ’

‘ Eye Island. ’

‘ Eye Island? What the deuce are we going there for? Oh, to see the little one’s father — I remember, yes. Is he a smuggler, then, her father? ’

‘ Do ye have patience, Georgie. You’ll hear it all, I tell ye. ’

‘ Well, some twelve months ’t was after you went away as there came one night, drizzly and dark as pitch, some one knocking to my door. When I turns out there’s a poor woman, Georgie, with little child in her arms. Georgie,’ he went on, speaking low and slowly and trying to see Heaton’s face through the darkness, ‘ that was poor Mrs. Etheredge. It would have made ye sad to see it. Fine things she had on, too, nice things, but wet, dripping, muddy, herself looking that tired and ill — but there! I need n’t tell ye that. Poor thing! I did for her best I could, but ’t was all no use. She was in sort of nervous fever, I reckon. She could never rest a minute all night. She said as *he* would be after her. She prayed me, begged me — spoke of how you had told her to

come to me if so be she was in trouble — begged me would I put her somewhere safe away from him; for she feared, she said, as he would be after her, seeing as she had spoken to him one time — had said as she would leave him, and as I, your friend, would take care of her.'

The parson paused, and Heaton said, as if answering him, but in reality more in soliloquy: 'Yes, I remember there was a baby, and she was devoted to it, too, as to her one safeguard from what he was like to drive her to, but I never saw it.'

He had heard every word the other said, but the whole meaning of it he was only grasping by difficult degrees.

'Well, now, Georgie, I must tell ye a bit of confession to my own shame. First, about the time when you was boy down here, I used to go out trawling and put in to Eye Island often with Joey Dart. His father in to Galsworthy used to own the smack then, but Joey used to skipper her pretty much. And so I got to know the Eye Islanders, putting in there, in rough weather, days together, and I liked them — rough lot; and they liked me — rough lot too, I reckon; and it so happened as they'd got a

cargo there one time and could n't make a way to ship it over any way. So I says, joking more than anything, "Why don't ye run some down on our coast?" I says.'

'Stop a bit, Jack,' Heaton exclaimed, in a voice that trembled with excitement. 'What's the little one's name?'

'Why, there! I've told ye, to all intents and purposes, if only you'd have listened. But you've got it right now, I see. Yes, the name's the same — Agneta Etheredge.'

'Good heavens, how extraordinary!'

'Well, there! 't isn't so extraordinary, really, when I've told ye,' said the parson regretfully, as one whose duty it is to demolish a pleasantly romantic mystery by a comparatively commonplace explanation.

'I might have known it, I might have known it,' Heaton reiterated, still speaking to himself.

'I should think ye might have knowed it,' the parson assented cordially. 'Every day as I looked at the little one I wondered however you could help knowing it. 'T is almost a sin against the poor little child to say it, but she's the image of that father of hers more than ever

two things of different age and different sex were alike before.'

'Yes, it's true, poor little one! I wonder what she'll come to, the little one.'

The parson declined to prophesy. After a moment's silence he resumed his tale.

'Well, these Eye Island chaps they laughed when I said run a cargo down on our coast. 'Where run 'un to?' they says, and so forth. But it so happened as I'd been most intimate with the old Squire Venn afore this one, and he'd told me, what he'd never told, I believe, to other soul (for his father as built the Folly told him keep it secret) about the cave and the steps to the Folly just as you've been down along them. And there's no need to stop at the Folly unless you've mind to, for that there cave runs up all along that stream of water right up to Bromley Scratch. There, if you've a mind to, you can make your ways out through furze and great boughs of fir-trees almost on the moor, and no sign of the road you've come.'

'And that's what the cow-doctor saw when he had D. T., eh?' Heaton interrupted.

'That's what cow-doctor saw, not when he had D. T., for he never had it, poor chap! only

we made him think he had, so as he should n't make too much noise about it. But that 's going a long way ahead. The time I 'm telling ye of, I says to the fellows out at Eye, I says: "Let me get the crew I want and I 'll run down a bit of your cargo and give ye receipt or payment soon as ever it 's aboard." Well, they reckoned as that was right. I went home, got the little landlord — new landlord he was then — of the Brown Bread Tray to agree to take the stuff; and in a week's time Joey Dart and I 'd run our first cargo of contraband.

' Well, there! I 've been main sorry and 'shamed many time since, for all I 've gone on doing it pretty regular. But some way I could n't give it up. 'T was n't for the profit of it, but I did dearly love the fun of it, and the risk and the excitement and all. But, there! 't is over now. I thought when old Kit died as I should never have gone down they Folly steps through the old cave again; nor I would n't, only being in a hurry about your little one there, and Joey having brought the smack round that way.'

' Well, but how did that stonemason fellow with the lantern get there, and the boat? ' Heaton asked.

‘Joey sent ’un round Bromley Scratch way to get the boat clear and that, while he called me to fetch you and the little one, so as to lose no time. Boat ’s been there this long while.’

‘Lose no time about what?’

‘There, now! You’re beginning at it. Don’t get asking foolish questions else there ’ll be no end. I ’ll tell ye soon enough. You see I knowed Eye Island and the folks there well enough by this time when that poor lady came to me the way I’ve told ye, and it so happened as I knowed a good soul of a farmer’s wife out at the farm there. Well, I thinks to myself——’

‘Jack!’ interrupted Heaton; ‘do you mean to say you let that — that you let her die out there, on Eye Island?’

‘I let her die, Georgie,’ assented the parson, ‘if you will call it so; and she died out on Eye Island, poor soul! I did my best for the poor lady, Georgie. I was bound to take her out of the way somewhere. I took a doctor to her twice there; and last time I made ’un stay there whether he would or no, for I would n’t take ’un back; and he was near taking the law on me for it. But the poor lady died, though.’

‘Oh, Jack, I beg your pardon, my good old

friend. But you can see how it looked just at first, before I understood it properly.'

'Yes, Georgie, boy, I know, I know,' the parson said gently. 'No need to beg pardon of me. But there's something I should have told ye before,' he resumed. ' 'T was only the day after she came to me as I shipped the poor soul and the little one over to Eye — her only chance for a rest of mind and body to feel safe away from that husband. And not a day too soon did I do it, Georgie, for next day when I got home late, tacking against head-wind all the way across, there was a man sitting waiting for me in my parlor — Captain Etheredge. And he guessed, and he was certain, and he said he *knowed* as his poor lady had come down to me. And he still was certain though I told him lies till I lost my temper and I swore at him, and he swore back at me. And at last he got up and he says, not in any temper then, but in a grim earnest way as haunted me afterwards: "God judge you, parson, who call yourself His servant, for you've made a bad man into a desperate one." '

'I wonder if he could have loved her after all in his way?' Heaton said thoughtfully.

‘Don’t know. Took a rum way to show it if he did, I reckon,’ was the only response. ‘However, ’t was months after that and I never heard his name at all, not till after her death, about the time you came to the Folly, and then, all at once, it came up right on top. ’T was over at Eye Island as I heard of him again, working the contraband trade on the Continent. He worked a lot of it, too, he did, lot more than ever came to Eye. Well, that set me on the thinking tack again. Thinks I, he ’ll be hearing of folks of his own name at Eye, and for all his poor wife was beyond his reach, poor soul, he might fairly claim his own daughter, which wouldn’t be for her good at all I reckoned.’

‘The little one, you mean; she was still looked after at the farm, then, after *she* died?’

The parson nodded. ‘She was, and I felt ’t was n’t quite the place for her, though. A rough lot, although kindly, and all speaking a worse lingo than I do. But what was I to do? Could n’t be expected to make a nursery in my house, I suppose. However, soon as I heard this about the father, I thought then

't was time to be doing something, sure enough. And do ye know what 't was I did do? '

' Yes, I suppose I do.'

' Yes, that 's right; you know, I see. 'T was I as brought ye that child. I brought her into the Folly by same road as we brought her out. And, Georgie, I do hope as I did no wrong, and as you 'll forgive, Georgie, if it looks as if there was want of respect,' he said earnestly, ' for 't was I as brought her into your wife's room and laid the little one on her bed.'

' Jack, my dear old friend! What a good friend you are! It was for my sake you did it all, I know that well enough, and I never can be grateful enough to you. It must have been no end of time and trouble, and it must have cost you a bit of money too, Jack.'

' All right, Georgie. Thanks is taken for granted with us.'

' Well, they 'll have to be in my case, Jack, for I am sure I never can express them. But tell me, Jack, why all that secrecy about the little one? Why not have asked us to take care of her and told us who she was? '

' Well, you see,' said the parson in the tone of one seeking escape from rather a hard corner,

and vigorously scratching his head. ' You see, I thought, I thought as — well, dasey! then,' he exclaimed, changing from the reflective into the decisive mood, ' I 'll tell ye what I did think. I thought, not knowing your wife as I know her now, I thought as she might not altogether like it, do ye see? — to have about her and to have to play the mother to the child of — Mrs. Etheredge's child, in fact; do ye see? You see most women are queer folks. You never quite know where you've got them, you don't. But there! 't is no blame to them; 't is the same with mares,' the parson concluded with grave thoughtfulness. — ' What are you laughing at? '

' Oh! — the weather. '

' Very fine weather, 't is, I call it; soldier's wind. Must be half-way over, I reckon; ' and the parson went ' forrad,' judiciously leaving Heaton time to get his newly acquired ideas into some order, before opening a fresh fire of questions.

There was a steady breeze of wind, and the smack, which Captain Dart affirmed to be the fastest on that coast, carrying all her canvas, was lapping through the water finely. It is

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but fair to say that the same encomium was passed on his own particular craft by each skipper of a fishing-smack along that coast, so the truth must have been told somewhere. As they approached Eye Island sea-birds that had been asleep in the water were dimly seen in the moonlight rising before the boat in little flocks of ever increasing number as they drew nearer the land.

At length it occurred to Heaton to ask some questions which it was strange he had not thought of before.

‘ Jack, ’ he said, going up to his friend. ‘ How is it that Etheredge happens to be over here at all, in the first place? Was it just about the smuggling, which you so euphemistically call the “contraband,” or was it to look for the little one? And in the second place, what is he dying of? How do ye know he’s dying at all? There’s no doctor over here, is there? ’

‘ No, there’s no doctor, but he’s dying, right enough. The skipper said as he was dying, and he knows. Likely he’s dead by now. ’

The skipper here referred to was the skipper *par excellence*, the Skipper with a capital S, the Skipper and King of Eye Island, where not

only was his word law, but his very opinion was received as Gospel, with regard to every event on Eye Island, present, preterite, or future.

‘I do believe,’ the parson resumed, ‘as ’t was after the little maiden he came. I only go by what Joey Dart told me. And as for how he comes to be dying, ’t was a spar or something fell on his thigh and crushed him aboard some French craft coming over.’

‘But whatever was the use of bringing me over here?’ Heaton asked resentfully, thinking of his two sleepless nights in succession and of poor Nelly alone at the Folly. ‘He didn’t want to see me. He only wants to see the little one.’

‘He do want to see ye, very bad, according to what Joey said. I don’t know what ’t is about, I’m sure.’

‘Does he really? Poor fellow! I hope he’s not gone. I wonder if there’s no chance for him?’

The parson shook his head. His faith in the skipper, the *genius loci*, was strong.

The smack came to anchor about a hundred yards from the shore, and a landing was with

some difficulty effected (by the light of a dingy horn lantern) from the boat on to some slippery, seaweedy boulders, heaped together into a bad imitation of a jetty. Then the parson carrying the child, who was wide awake now and quite happy, led the way for Heaton up a steep road-track through a small coombe in the cliffs to a little house in which one window on the first floor showed a dim light. This house in the day-time was the general and only store, or shop, on the island.

An uncomfortable interval of suspense, while the light moved in an undecided way on the window above, followed the parson's knock. At length a shuffling step came to the door, which was then opened by a woman who did not look a desirable sick-nurse, Heaton thought.

'How is he?' asked the parson, losing no time in useless salutations.

' 'E 'th alive,' the woman answered, taking up his cue with startling brevity. ' 'E 'th alive; but 'e 'th main bad. 'E 'th getting dead-like all the way up.'

The parson went first up to the bare room where Etheredge lay on his death-bed. He did not hear them come in, but as they came

nearer the bed his eyes opened, and Heaton saw a face scarcely changed from the one he used to meet in the London clubs. Etheredge's was one of those sallow, dark complexions which do not depend on the blood for their coloring, and his face had always been drawn and lined.

'Is that your parson's face, come to grin at my death?' said the dying man savagely to Passmore. 'Why don't you answer?' he went on, as the parson stood silent. 'What have you there? — something of mine? Have you brought back something of what you robbed me of, now it is too late? Can't you speak?' — for even the parson's not very sensitive nature was shocked by this address from one in Etheredge's condition, and he was at a loss for an answer.

'Go away, Jack. Give the little one to me. It is maddening him seeing you here,' Heaton whispered, taking the child from the parson, who with unwonted meekness left the room.

'Thank God, he's gone!' Etheredge exclaimed, letting his head sink back on his pillow. 'Heaton, Heaton! that's you, isn't it? Yes; I know it is. I wanted you. I

thought you would come. I wanted to tell you this — what was it? My head is so confused. Yes — I wanted to tell you that I don't hate you. I don't suppose you care to hear that. I did once; but I don't hate you now. If there were more men like you in the world, there would be fewer like me. Do you know — my wife? I loved her. You can't believe that, can you? I did, Heaton. I behaved to her brutally, as I did to everything I ever had to do with in the world; but I loved her, Heaton. Do you believe me?'

' Yes, I believe I do.'

' I loved her; and while I had her she was the one thing that stood between me and going utterly to ruin. Do you know why I would not fight that duel with you? Did you think I was afraid? No; it was not that. I never put much value on myself, I don't think. But I was afraid of this: that if I killed you — and I wished you dead then with all my heart — she would never see me again. She did not love me. She loved you — I know that. She was good to me; God knows she was good to me, but she did not love me — nobody *could* love *me*.'

He paused, as if to let the fact sink into the mind of his hearer and to ponder it well in his own. Heaton endeavored to turn his attention.

‘ See! this is your child, Etheredge, my poor fellow.’

The little one had been gazing at her father all the time with wide-open wondering eyes.

‘ Is it? ’ Etheredge said indifferently. ‘ It is too late now; but I am glad to see her. Stop!’ he exclaimed, with sudden change of mood. ‘ Is that parson taking care of her? ’

‘ No; I am,’ Heaton said.

‘ Heaton, if there were more men like you in the world there ’ld be fewer in it like me,’ he repeated — ‘ if there are any,’ he added with an afterthought. ‘ This is your father, child!’ he went on to the little one. ‘ Will you say “father” to me once? Say “father.” ’

‘ I ’se sorry for ’oo,’ the little one said, understanding but vaguely.

‘ Say “father” to him, little one,’ Heaton said.

‘ I ’se sorry for ’oo,’ she repeated, nodding towards the bed.

‘ Say “father” once — just once — little one,’

Etheredge pleaded, taking up Heaton's name for her.

'Don't wish to want to,' the child said obstinately, with curious perverseness.

The frown deepened on Etheredge's face.

'Oh, child, I am your father, nevertheless; and I only pray I have left you no heritage at all, for, if any, it is only a cursed nature.'

And as Heaton looked from the one face to the other, so like it, he could not help feeling a vague mistrust for the little one's future.

Then Heaton, deeply feeling his own inadequacy, vainly attempted to appeal to anything of a spiritual nature in Etheredge. He regretted there was no one more capable than himself to help a dying sinner to leave the world in a proper frame of mind — no clergyman. But this word was met with a fury of indignation.

'Parson! Parson! Bring me a parson like the man who robbed me of my only hope in life? No! Bring me a parson who can tell me why God brought such a man as me into the world, and then I'll listen to him.'

'It is no good,' he said, in answer to Heaton's exhortations. 'Repent! I could say I repent,

but it would be a lie. I am *sorry*. No man could look back on a life like mine and not be sorry; but repent!—no, I do not repent, for I know if God gave me back my life I should live it the same again. And now, I shall go to sleep.’ And almost before the words were out of his mouth he fell into a heavy, drowsy state, from which he never awoke.

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The story is told. A few sentences will sum up the Epilogue.

Within an hour of Etheredge’s death the parson, Heaton, and the little one were aboard the smack and away from Eye, whither the parson returned the following day to perform the strange duty of reading the burial service over the body of the man who had cursed him almost with his dying breath.

The little one, Nelly’s nameless *enfant trouvé*, came safe home in the smack, which Nelly thereupon re-christened the ‘White Swan,’ with the name of ‘Agneta Etheredge;’ and Nelly loved her none the less for that.

‘To think that it should have been *her* child that has given us our lives!’ she said to her

husband. For, indeed, if it had not been for the little one's words to Heaton in the churchyard, Nelly would by that time have been far away, and the rift, instead of quite cemented up, a mighty chasm.

Heaton and Nelly have abjured their utter seclusion, but they still spend some months of each year at the Folly.

'We cannot quite give up our Folly,' was Nelly's verdict, 'the name was far too appropriate!'

The parson no longer has intercourse with Eye Island as before, nor does Joey Dart so often go 'fishing with a dry trawl.' The former has, moreover, led the little landlord to see the error of his ways, in consequence, perhaps, of which the cow-doctor constantly proclaims in his own ejaculatory manner that he 'means to say the quality of the whisky is deteriorating, wha'?' The parson is also less trenchant in his remarks about the influence of the aneroid barometer on the weather, but Mrs. Major still clings pertinaciously to her theory about chevy-ing cats.

Mr. Perry is more at peace with himself than heretofore, scanning the seaward horizon with

less suspicious telescope, and the shortcomings of Mr. Muxworthy with more Christian charity.

And the little one is still called the little one, although she has found a name of her own, and although she is not quite so little as she used to be.'

THE END.

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